

**UNESCO Regional Conferences
in Support of Global Literacy**

**QATAR FOUNDATION
Innovations in Education Symposium 3**

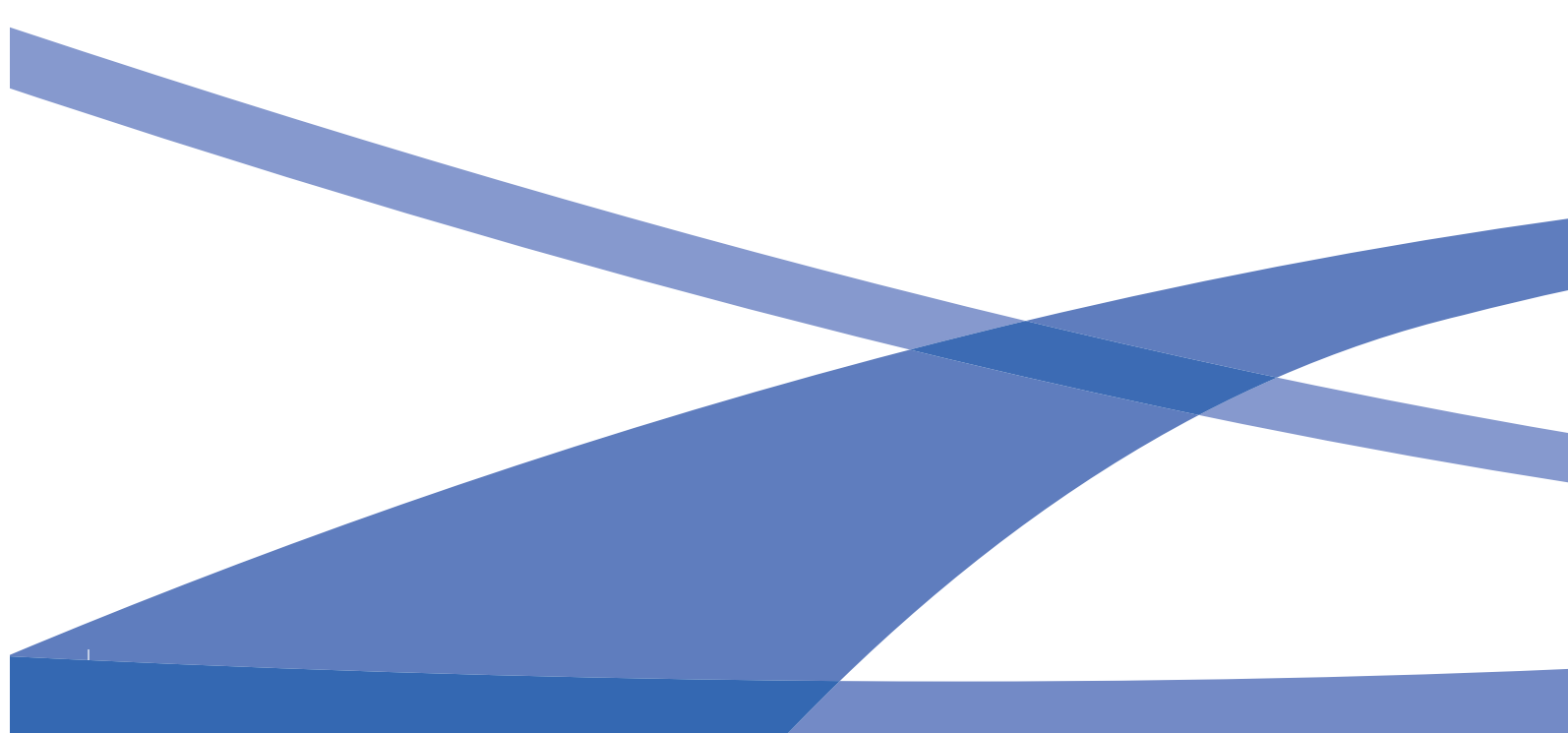
**Literacy Challenges in the Arab Region
Building Partnerships and Promoting
Innovative Approaches**

March 12 -14, 2007
Doha, Qatar

Conference Report

ED/UNP/UNLD/RP/08/5





Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned

Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser al Missned has played an active and dynamic role in education and social reforms in Qatar as well as a major role in spearheading various national and international development projects.

Her Highness is chairperson of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, a private non-profit organization founded in 1995 on the personal initiative of His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani, the Emir of Qatar. In 2003, the Qatar Foundation officially inaugurated Education City, a prototypical university of the future which brings campuses of international universities on site in Qatar sharing research and community based ventures.

Her Highness is also president of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, a government institution founded in 1998 with the aim of strengthening the role of family in society. The Council is active in analyzing issues related to family and children's rights and proposing culturally appropriate solutions.

Her Highness also plays an important role on the international stage. In 2003, UNESCO appointed her Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education. In this capacity she is actively promoting various international projects to improve the quality and accessibility of education worldwide. In 2003, she established the International Fund for Higher Education in Iraq which is dedicated to the reconstruction of institutions of advanced learning in Iraq. In 2005 she was selected as a member of the United Nations High Level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations, set up by the Secretary General of the UN to develop creative mechanisms for fighting terrorism.

Her Highness graduated from the University of Qatar in 1986 with a degree in Sociology and was awarded honorary doctorates from Virginia Commonwealth University, Texas A&M University and Imperial College in London.

On 15th October 2007 Her Highness was awarded the prestigious Chatham House Prize. This prestigious annual award is given to a leading international statesperson deemed to have made the most significant contribution to the improvement of international relations in the previous year. It was presented to Her Highness in recognition of her commitment to progressive education and community welfare in Qatar and her strong advocacy of closer relations between Islamic countries and the West.

Mr Koïchiro Matsuura Director-General of UNESCO

Born in Tokyo in 1937, Mr Matsuura was educated at the Law Faculty of the University of Tokyo, and at Haverford College, where he earned a B.A. in economics (Phi Beta Kappa, 1961). He returned to the College's Pennsylvania campus in 2006 to receive an honorary doctorate in law from his alma mater.

Mr Matsuura's first diplomatic posting was to Ghana in 1961, where he covered ten West African countries. He worked throughout his career in development cooperation and in political affairs. In the 1970s he served as Counselor at the Embassy of Japan in Washington, DC, and later as Consul General in Hong Kong. As Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1992 to 1994, he was Japan's Sherpa for the G-7 Summit.

In 1999, while serving as Japan's Ambassador to France and chairing UNESCO's flagship World Heritage Committee, Mr Matsuura was elected by Member States as Director-General of UNESCO. After a first term marked by programme and reform accomplishments, as well as the ascension of new countries, including the United States, to the Organization, he was re-elected to a second term in October 2005.

As Director-General of UNESCO, Mr Matsuura has given particular priority to promoting universal basic education. With UNESCO exercising a lead role in the global movement to provide Education for All (EFA) by 2015, as well as in efforts to achieve the objectives of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), he has launched major new initiatives in the fields of teacher training, education and HIV and AIDS, and literacy.

Mr Matsuura has authored books in Japanese, English and French on UNESCO, international relations, the intersection between diplomacy and development cooperation, Japan-US relations, Japan-French, and a history of the G-7 Summit. He is married with two sons and three grandchildren.

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Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser al Missned

Speech by Her Highness Sheikah Mozah Bint Nasser Al Missned
Consort of His Highness, the Emir of Qatar
Chairperson, Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and
Community Development

Conference on Illiteracy Challenges in the Arab Region
12 March 2007
Doha, Qatar

**In the name of God
The Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful**

H.E. The Director General of UNESCO, Ladies and Gentlemen,
It is my great pleasure to open this conference on illiteracy challenges in the Arab region. This topic carries the utmost sensitivity and complexity: sensitive because illiteracy represents a paralysis within our society, preventing us from reaching our full potential; but also because it presents us with the opportunity to demonstrate the worthiness of our belonging to this millennium.

Is it possible for any one among us to imagine comprehensive social development without taking into consideration the issue of knowledge values, improvement of human capacities and the legitimate right of everyone to have access to knowledge and information?

The complexity of the issue is that we all, whether in the Arab world or outside it, realize the importance and necessity of combating illiteracy.

But when this title is put forward, the reaction is often to present what has been fulfilled of strategies, plans and programs designed to contain this plague as a means to learning reading and writing.

Is this the function of literacy? Or as I imagine this function must be an approach to improve human efficiency and building capacities. It is critical that we accurately set our definition of illiteracy because specifying the concept and agreeing on its elements will help us in building the methodology of addressing it.

Literacy in this sense is a system that enables the individual to understand his or her surroundings and provides him or her with the proper and necessary tools to make a positive impact on his or her environment and surroundings, now and in the future.

This controversial interaction makes literacy an approach to human development that is a means to reach knowledge and build societies. In this sense it also enables the individual to employ his or her experience to serve the individual, their family, the community and the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,
We are in front of a complex pattern with which we face several forms of illiteracies: illiteracy of reading and writing; illiteracy of technology; illiteracy of environmental awareness; illiteracy of culture; illiteracy of media; and health illiteracy among others.

When approaching these various forms of illiteracy, shall we adopt a splitting methodology that considers each case separately or one

that approaches the literacy community, requiring that we deal with these components within the context of a comprehensive vision?

I believe the second option is the most appropriate, particularly considering that it conforms to the philosophy of education for life.

But this approach leads us to a greater challenge because it requires a great deal of societal innovation and imagination to create a suitable environment for a knowledge community to flourish.

Therefore, it is necessary to institutionalize literacy to make it a societal choice based on a political will that respects the role of the citizen and recognizes the status and role of the community by building wide partnerships with the civil society organizations that are so critical to success.

Ladies and gentlemen,
In this conference devoted to illiteracy challenges in the Arab world, we are invited to exchange expertise and experiences, employing all our collective resources to build an advanced approach that takes into account the particularities of our region without ignoring that we belong to a rapidly changing world.

We should not miss the opportunities and must realize that to build and promote a knowledge community and not just the information community requires a political will that lays the foundation for deep reforms designed to make education a driving force of the community. When such political will exists, it will make literacy a strategic element of sustainable human development.

Eliminating illiteracy is a system of significance to citizen development; it should not be circumstantial, elitist or sectarian nor should it include gender or social differences. Our success in eliminating illiteracy according to this perspective will be the basis towards modernity and democracy and also the way to peace and stability in our region.

If this is our deep-rooted conviction, then it is our duty to observe all the components of our educational system and strive to fully develop them. It is our highest priority to protect this system under all circumstances - particularly during times of war and crises. This difficulty could be solved once we reassess our priorities and develop a policy that takes into consideration not only short term security interests, but one that is also based on a political insight that looks to the future and plans for it as a reserve stock for human survival and stability.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Perhaps the case of education in Iraq is a living example of what could result from confused agendas and competing priorities. How could we explain the existence of will and capacity to surpass the pressures of the security situation when it concerns the protection of natural resources flow? In fact, this capacity becomes null when the aim is to protect the intellectual resources of educational institutions and universities, yet we stand as spectators and attribute our inaction to the difficulty of the situation.

Since sustainable development is such a popular topic, whose end and means is man, it is better for us to get more in harmony with the logic of the age and show all keenness on nurturing brains before oil fields.

I think we are all extremely concerned with solidarity between students, graduates, and educationalists in Iraq, since all possess strategic depth of the Arab and human intellect.

I believe it is our duty and the duty of UNESCO, the guardian of the world's educational conscience, to strive to find mechanisms to activate and enhance this solidarity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Indeed the elimination of illiteracy is no less important than combating global warming or containing immunodeficiency virus. Circumstances dictate that we have to deal with these dangerous phenomena with innovation and imagination, and require an integrated vision to realize sustainable development by overcoming these and other phenomena.

It is imperative that we use the period following these regional conferences to review how we can employ the results reached to make illiteracy elimination a strategic tributary of sustainable development.

Only when this is accomplished will we be closer to containing illiteracy in its widest sense.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Koïchiro Matsuura Director-General of UNESCO

**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of UNESCO Regional Conference in Support of
Global Literacy on: Literacy Challenges in the Arab States Region:
Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches**

Doha, Qatar, 12 March 2007

**His Highness the Emir of Qatar,
Her Highness Sheikha Mozah,
First Ladies,
Mr President of UNESCO's General Conference,
Ministers of the Arab States Region,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this important Conference on Literacy Challenges in the Arab States Region. This is the first of a series of six Regional Conferences in Support of Global Literacy that UNESCO will be organizing over the next two years.

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned, Chairperson of the Qatar Foundation and UNESCO Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education, for hosting this Conference, and also for giving such an inspiring speech.

Her Highness's determination and commitment – as witnessed in her speech – is key to understanding Qatar's exemplary achievements in the field of education. Her unwavering support is also a driving force behind international efforts to provide good quality education to each and every child, young person and adult by 2015.

I would also like to pay tribute to those First Ladies who have joined us this evening. You have a unique opportunity to reach out to people, in particular as champions of the needs of those excluded from the benefits of literacy – especially girls and women.

I wish to thank the President of UNESCO's General Conference, Dr Musa Bin Jaafar Bin Hassan, for his compelling statement on the importance of literacy.

Finally, let me extend my gratitude to the other strategic partners, whose commitment, guidance and wisdom will contribute to our deliberations: Ministers; UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors; our sister UN agencies, the World Bank and OECD; representatives from international and regional NGOs and other implementing agencies; universities, foundations, donors; and literacy experts and practitioners from across the region.

This meeting is a direct follow-up to the White House Conference on Global Literacy, which was hosted last September in New York by Mrs Laura Bush, First Lady of the United States and Honorary Ambassador for the United Nations Literacy Decade. We look forward to a video message from Mrs Bush later this evening.

The White House Conference was the starting-point for a major campaign in support of literacy within the framework of the UN

Literacy Decade (2003-2012) and UNESCO's Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE).

The Conference also falls within the framework of the Qatar Foundation's Innovations in Education Symposia. These provide an important forum for advancing the education agenda in the Arab States Region.

Your Highness,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Achieving universal literacy is one of the main international goals of our time. Literacy is the foundation of all future learning and a major force for development. It is a source of individual empowerment and an instrument for building stable and prosperous societies. Female literacy, in particular, can have an immensely positive impact on education, health, household income and all aspects of family well-being.

This is why our meeting this week is so important.

We are gathered here in Doha to identify and discuss main challenges and achievements in literacy in the Arab States Region. Our aim is to exchange experiences, to learn about effective practices, and, most importantly, to develop recommendations on the way forward.

We must act quickly if the goal of Education for All by 2015 is to be realized. While significant progress has been made over the past few decades, globally there are still more than 781 million adults who cannot read or write. In the Arab States Region alone, 58 million people – that is 34% of the adult population – are deprived of literacy. However, literacy rates do vary markedly from country to country, from below 60% in Mauritania, Morocco and Yemen, to above 90% in Jordan, Kuwait and Qatar.

An additional 6.5 million children do not go to school in the Arab States Region, and have therefore little chance of acquiring basic literacy skills.

Further educational opportunities, as well as effective social participation, will remain largely out-of-reach for those individuals who do not gain a good basis in literacy.

The goal of this Conference is not only to give literacy the profile it deserves on the agendas of national governments and international partners. Above all, it is to make a real and measurable impact on the life of their people, thus contributing to sustainable human development and poverty reduction.

This Conference is not an end in itself, but rather a starting point for action.

Our aim is to build cooperation among stakeholders, and mobilize partners and resources for concrete interventions at the country level.

Therefore, I would like to invite all partners to support countries in the region in their literacy work. This support may take the form of technical assistance, knowledge transfer or capacity building. Financial support to on-going or new model programmes is also crucial, as is promoting South-South or North-South collaboration. We need greater investment in all these areas if we are to make progress.

Let me add that the outcomes of this and subsequent regional conferences will feed into the preparation of the mid-term review of the UN Literacy Decade, which I will submit to the UN General Assembly in 2008. It will also provide input to the sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), which UNESCO is organizing in 2009.

Your Highness,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Literacy has been a high priority for UNESCO for over 60 years. Under my leadership, UNESCO has, through the UN Literacy Decade and LIFE, redoubled its efforts to meet the basic learning needs of children and adults around the world.

Let me assure you that UNESCO is committed to helping the Arab States Region achieve the Education for All goal of attaining a 50 per cent improvement in adult literacy levels by 2015. Special attention will be given to those countries that are facing the greatest challenges: Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan and Yemen. These are the countries where UNESCO's LIFE Initiative is currently

being implemented, in support of which the Education Sector is mobilizing the expertise not only of UNESCO's new Institute on Lifelong Learning, but also of our Regional Bureau in Beirut and our Cluster and Field Offices.

UNESCO's commitment is firm. However, it must be met with increased commitment by Arab States themselves. National governments will need to significantly enhance investment in literacy if EFA targets are to be met.

I also wish to call upon donors – both regional and international – to channel more aid to literacy. In the Arab States Region, the proportion of aid to education that goes to the basic level is very low: less than 5%. We can presume that within this, the amount for literacy is miniscule. Moreover, aid is not always directed to those countries most in need.

Financing for basic education in general, and for literacy in particular, must be scaled up, especially for those countries furthest from the EFA goals.

Let me conclude by wishing you positive and productive deliberations over the next two days. I congratulate you on your hard work and look forward to the outcomes of your discussions. I sincerely hope that this Conference will serve as the basis for renewed commitment to achieving literacy for all.

Thank you

“Literacy is a system that enables the individual to understand his surroundings and provides him with the proper and necessary tools to make a positive impact on his environment and surroundings whether immediate or distant...”
Her Highness speech

“Literacy, besides being a fundamental human right, is a foundation not only for achieving Education for All (EFA) but, more broadly, for reaching the overarching goal of reducing human poverty. And yet, 65 million adults in the Arab States region lack the basic learning tools to make informed decisions and participate fully in the development of their societies. Tackling the literacy challenge is a moral and development imperative...”¹

¹ EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006. Regional Overview: Arab States, p.1

Background

The Conference on Literacy Challenges in the Arab States Region: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches, took place in Doha, Qatar from 12 to 14 March 2007 under the auspices of Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Missned, Chairperson of Qatar foundation. Jointly organized by UNESCO and Qatar Foundation, the Conference was a landmark meeting of policy makers and representatives of civil society groups, private providers, universities and research institutes, donors, and practitioners from the Arab states, as well other parts of the world. It is the very first of a series of regional conferences in support of Global Literacy that UNESCO is organizing along the framework of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) and the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE).

The conference was also the third in Qatar Foundation's Innovations in Education (IIE) series, launched in 2003 to explore cutting-edge research and practice in education, both in the Arab region and worldwide. Since then, IIE has brought together researchers and practitioners in a number of areas that are critical to allowing individuals to fulfill their potential while contributing to the development of their societies.

By way of a background, the UNLD situates Literacy for All "at the heart of Education for All as the foundation of lifelong learning. It aims to address the basic learning and development needs of almost 800 million adults - two out of three of whom are women - who cannot read and write as well as over 100 million school-age children who are not in school. The goal of the UN Literacy Decade is to mobilize the political will and action as well as the corresponding resources necessary to make literacy an international priority."²

LIFE, on the other hand, serves as a global strategic framework of collaborative action for achieving the goals of the UNLD. Launched by UNESCO in 2005, it is operational in 35 countries with a literacy rate of less than 50% or a population of more than 10 million people who cannot read. These countries host almost 85% of the world's non-literate population. In the Arab States, the countries covered by LIFE include Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, and Yemen.

On average, only two-thirds of adults in the Arab Region can read and write with understanding, one of the lowest adult literacy rates in the world. The absolute number of adult illiterates for 2000-2004 was estimated to be around 58 million.

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

- to advocate for literacy;
- to identify and discuss main challenges and achievements in literacy;
- to develop recommendations on the way forward;
- to present and disseminate effective literacy practices;
- to build cooperation among stakeholders; and
- to mobilize partners and resources for concrete interventions at the country level

The idea of holding six Regional Conferences in Africa, East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific, South, South-West and Central Asia, the Arab Region, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean, as part of a vigorous literacy campaign, built on the goodwill and resolve of the September 2006 White-House Conference on Global Literacy, which was hosted by US First Lady Laura Bush, Honorary Ambassador for the UN Literacy Decade.

The Arab Regional Conference covered the same core themes that are taken up by all conferences. Four Roundtable presentations and discussions were organized on main challenges and achievements in the region, on the following themes:

- Literacy Policies and Strategies, Costs and Finance
- Programme Delivery
- Benchmarking, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Literacy
- Literacy Interventions for Crisis, Post-Conflict, and Emergency Situations

To maximize participation, break-out sessions on each of the Roundtable Presentations followed the discussions.

A selection of effective practices in the region was presented in five panels on the following programme foci:

- Mother-Child Literacy and Intergenerational Learning
- Literacy for Health
- Enriching Literate Environments: Culture, Reading and Publishing
- Literacy for Economic Self-Sufficiency
- ICTs and Literacy
- Media Literacy

This Conference Report provides a synthesis of the points and key issues raised in the Conference papers, plenary and panel presentations, roundtable discussions, and the break-out discussions. It is organized into two parts as follows:

Part I presents some of the challenges and issues identified in various Conference sessions in broad strokes.

Part II is a synthesis of good practices as well as challenges and issues. It is organized along the chronology of meetings, plenary sessions, panel presentations, roundtable discussions, and break-out workshops.

² UNESCO Regional Conferences in Support of Global Literacy, February 2007

Part I: CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

The following issues and challenges identified in the Conference are among the most salient:

- the restricted notion of literacy and the need to broaden it in line with emerging challenges and growing complexities;
- the gaps in literacy levels among countries within the Arab region, among social classes and between genders within countries and the urgency of addressing the needs of the literacy-poor countries, as well as the marginalized and disadvantaged in the region, particularly women and girls;
- the relatively low priority of literacy in the policy agenda and the urgency of putting literacy up front;
- lack of coherent literacy programmes in particular countries and the region that address its diverse needs;
- the need to develop and scale up effective programmes;
- the gap between policy and implementation and the need for political will;
- lack of private sector or civil society involvement or the need for partnership;
- lack of reliable and valid data and the need for information management and a system of assessment, monitoring and evaluation;
- the need to document innovations and success stories in literacy across the Arab region and disseminate the documentation to the region and beyond;
- lack of resources to meet the literacy challenges of the Arab region and the need for region-wide mobilization of resources for the literacy-poor countries.

The Changing Concept Of Literacy

The Conference tackled several conceptual issues and their implications. The following were highlighted in various sessions:

- **The need to broaden the definition of literacy and shift to a more holistic notion.**

In this regard, the ideal typical depiction in Table I of the restricted and expanded concepts of literacy, which was originally codified in the 2005 Lyon Conference on Literacy and adopted by the 2006 Busan Conference, was proposed in the Doha Conference as a starting point for further conceptual refinement.

While the importance of adopting an expanded notion of literacy is a common thread that cut across most, if not all, sessions in the Doha Conference, the value of developing basic literacy skills as foundation for lifelong learning and the honing of critical minds, ought to be underscored. In fact, an issue raised in the Conference is the tendency of neo-literates without opportunities to enhance their newly-acquired skills to relapse to illiteracy. Equally disturbing is the observation of Conference participants that the younger generation seems to eschew reading and writing, which could have profound implications for the development of their capacity to think critically and act reflexively.

Ideal Typical Depiction of Restricted and Expanded Concepts 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 |

* Modified version from Bautista, Cynthia and Carol Medel-Anonuevo's Synthesis of the 2005 Lyon Conference on Literacy and Citizenship. www.unesco.org/education/uie/pdf/literacyineurope.pdf

- **The notion of functionality as a basis for a holistic view of literacy**

Focusing on the interaction between the individual and the environment in which he or she functions, nuances the conceptual divide between illiteracy and literacy. With few exceptions, even the illiterate, from this viewpoint, can function effectively within their specific environments although their potential for coping with the demands of a rapidly changing environment would be limited. One of the breakout sessions on literacy strategies and practices in the Conference emphasized this point. Implied is the notion of literacy as a process. It is not a once-and-for-all acquisition such that people who achieve minimum standards necessarily fall under the category 'literate' and function better. Conversely, those who do not meet such standards - and they would include the generation of the participants' mothers and fathers, - need not be less functional within their settings compared to their more literate counterparts.

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 Conference highlighted the need for more qualitative assessments, and for context-specific ways of measuring literacy. Since literacy acquisition is a process, it is quite possible for people to lose their skills out of misuse. This could be happening to a significant number of Grade 4 or Grade 6 dropouts, graduates of adult literacy programmes, and even formally educated persons who do not have the benefit of literate environments. "Aliteracy" was a word introduced in the Conference to refer to the last category of people.

Focus on the functionality of individuals in their societies raised an important question in one of the break-out groups on literacy policies and strategies: Should there be a minimum standard enforced for everyone or should programmes be tailored to the demands of learners? In response to this question, various sessions in the Conference called for and resonated with a paradigm shift from a teacher/trainer-centered, highly structured learning model to a learner-centered and process-oriented approach to literacy and learning. This approach is striving for a learner who is a critical thinker, someone capable of independent thinking and of engaging in the development of society. In short, responsible citizen of his or her nation, of the Arab region, and the world.

A learner-centered approach to literacy implies the following features of literacy programmes:

- context specificity
- language sensitivity³
- responsiveness to needs, diversity, flexibility⁴
- decentralized delivery of programmes⁵

³ There are different views in this regard. For instance, several paper presenters cited the research-based finding that the use of the mother tongue in the early childhood years help develop thinking skills more effectively and facilitates the subsequent learning of Arabic, English or any other language as a second or third language.

⁴ Many innovations including the writing of their own books by children under Palestinian Tamer Foundation's My First Book contests were enumerated in the Conference sessions. See also Part II for more details.

⁵ Giving teachers autonomy to develop the curriculum/learning material and involve learners.

- **The challenge posed by a broader vision of literacy to the Arab world.**

The UNDP Arab Human Development Report mentioned three deficits: freedom deficit, knowledge deficit, and gender deficit. The success of literacy programmes requires efforts to address these issues. The panels on media literacy and enhancing literate environments articulated this point eloquently. The media literacy panel, in particular, noted that if media literacy aims to instill a healthy skepticism borne out of a critical spirit among Arab citizens, it would be extremely difficult to develop a reflexive attitude among them if their respective societies are unable to nurture, and worse, even prevent the critical spirit from thriving.

Policy, Planning and the Value Of Literacy: Literacy, Education, and Development

The plenary and roundtable discussions suggest that governments in the region, as in other parts of the developing world, do not seem to be serious about literacy, particularly adult literacy. Their lack of political will reflects, in part, a system of valuation that marginalizes education in general and literacy, in particular.

The centrality of education in making a real difference for development, breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty, 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 the opening speeches, and the first roundtable discussion on literacy policies and strategies, which set the level and tone of later sessions.

Whether the high value of education, which government officials give lip service to, translates into political will and greater financing for education, is another matter, however. 'Where does literacy fit in the government's scheme of things?' was a question raised explicitly or implicitly in various sessions. Even if the value of education is extolled by powerful individuals in government and other 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 - and there are many examples of informal learning opportunities shared in the panels: the use of poetry, drama, for instance, - are relegated to the margins, lesser cousins who "walk in the shadow of the education system".

But literacy, broadly conceived, is intimately linked to basic education. Literacy lies at the heart of basic education. In fact, it is tantamount to basic education. By going beyond the development of the capacity to read, write and apply simple mathematics to everyday life, the expanded concept stresses the capacity to assess, integrate, manage and evaluate knowledge, and

acquire skills, capabilities generally associated with education. The underlying vision of a holistic frame that does not privilege cognitive abilities over other competencies, hews closely to the goal of basic education - the enabling of human beings to continuously learn, adjust to a rapidly changing environment, and build meaningful relationships and communities in multi-cultural contexts.

If literacy and basic education are linked inextricably, but are not the same, 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 of basic education. The preventive measures, that seem to be working, as shared in the Conference, make sense. One session called for the three-pronged approach to literacy which includes raising the quality of primary schooling as well as programmes for youth and adults. Thus, making basic education compulsory (and free) across the Arab region, is a necessary component of the literacy campaign.

Basic education for all is about achieving a common set of competencies that everyone acquires regardless of the channels or sources each one used to acquire such education. Underlying EFA and the lifelong learning (LLL) paradigm 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. Adopting EFA and LLL would make one critical of linear thinking that is trapped in the perception that school-based education is superior to alternative learning streams and modes of delivery.

Organizationally, such thinking would translate to the integration of formal, non-formal (out-of-school youth and adult programmes) and informal education (museums, libraries, drama, poetry) and put an end to a fragmented educational system. Integration, one of the themes that crop up again and again in the conference sessions would, in turn, entail the provision of mechanisms for individuals to move in and out of different learning streams. In this context, adult education or learning is integral to the education system. Its incorporation into national education policy might help turn around a situation where hardly any investment was made in adult literacy in the last 20 years.

The Conference discussions highlighted the value of literacy and basic education for achieving social justice, alleviating poverty, substantiating participatory, human, and sustainable development, and attaining peace and stability in the region. It may be necessary, however, as suggested in a break-out group, to compile national

dossiers to demonstrate the impact and benefits of literacy even while the countries in the Arab region take important strides. For example, Morocco and Mauritania⁶ have policy frameworks for literacy promotion in the form of its inclusion in national education and development strategies.

Developing and Scaling Up Literacy Programmes

Despite great strides in the 1970s and the 1980s, the rate of literacy in Arab countries is still below that of other developing countries. The preponderance of female illiteracy is also alarming. Moreover, within the region there are wide gaps in literacy levels.

The diversity in literacy across the region, according to the Conference, requires different kinds of strategies. In particular, the high rate of female illiteracy, calls for gender-sensitive approaches. The Conference also underscored the need to develop learner - centered and multi-media literacy programmes with a complement of facilitators who possess the competencies to handle them. Innovative programmes and systems of delivery in various parts of the Arab world (including countries that have been profoundly affected by conflicts) and their benchmarking, which are summarized in Part II, were at the crux of the Conference discussions.

Gaps in Policy, Strategies and Implementation

It has been said that in terms of policy, Arab countries are strongly committed to take up the literacy challenge. In reality, however, the Conference discussion revealed that these commitments rarely translated to implemented plans of action, particularly in the area of adult literacy. Several issues were raised in this regard:

Issue of financing:

- relatively low priority of government financing for literacy; The conference stressed, however, that even if less developed countries in the Arab region were to prioritize literacy, they may not have the financial wherewithal to do so;
- the need for partnerships with the private sector, NGOs, and media. The private sector in particular can be made to put its money where its complaint—that the country does not produce the kind of labor needed, hence the need to import from other countries—lies;
- The misconception that adult literacy is only the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, and, consequently, the lack of involvement of Ministers of Finance and Budget in framing literacy and education policies. The proposals to address this problem include
- setting up of national councils and high level committees that would give more space and authority to NGOs, preferably with the representation of learners;

⁶ Both with an adult literacy rate of about 51%

- setting up of a regional mechanism for cooperation that should also include NGOs and private sector.
- Serious data gaps that constrain the depiction of a clear and compelling picture of the literacy condition for purposes of policy formulation. The Conference raised two sets of issues in this regard:
- measurement issues emanating from an expanded and process-oriented notion of literacy; and
- issues of reliability, validity, and data collection.

Some General Conclusions and Recommendations:

The conference noted that progress in literacy in the Arab States Region is being made as demonstrated by the following conclusions:

- Countries in the region are exerting strong efforts and attaining achievements in improving literacy;
- NGOs are making important and meaningful contributions to improving literacy and to developing new approaches;
- A range of innovative experiences, effective practices, and research evidence provide a sound basis for future action;
- Cooperation and partnerships, demonstrated through the Doha Conference, should be further expanded and strengthened;
- Most importantly, the presence of Ministers of Education from the region demonstrated their dedication to literacy. They will review their national policies and strategies according to the outcomes of the conference, integrate them into national plans, and work to increase investments in literacy;
- Of special significance is the fact that the First Ladies attending the conference, from within as well as outside the region, are committed to mobilise support and to rally around the cause of literacy in their own countries and beyond.

Recognising the particular challenges of the Arab States Region and the issues raised in various sessions, the Conference concluded with the following recommendations:

- The three-pronged approach proposed by the 2006 EFA Global Monitoring Report will serve as the framework for action: ensuring access to quality primary education, scaling up effective programmes, and creating literate environments;
- A broader definition of literacy is essential, encompassing skills necessary for productive and active participation in society, beyond merely reading, writing and numeracy;
- Literacy should be promoted as a right for everyone, irrespective of age and gender;
- Special attention should be given to LIFE countries;
- Countries in conflict and post-conflict situations require special efforts and support from the region and by the international community;
- Literacy for women and girls needs particular emphasis, with specific programmes to address their needs;
- There are effective programmes in the region that must be further evaluated and scaled up;
- Adult literacy is essential as part of wider development strategies and for achieving EFA and the Millennium Development Goals. This requires the collective responsibility of others ministries,

such as social development, employment, health, agriculture, finance and economy;

- Partnership is essential in achieving adult literacy goals. Actors include government, civil society and the private sector. In the Arab Region, the full engagement and recognition of NGOs will be crucial for promoting and delivering programmes;
- Research-based evidence supported by reliable and valid data is an essential basis for literacy policies and programmes. This a clear commitment to high-quality and sustained monitoring and evaluation, on the basis of recognised benchmarks;
- Investment in capacity development in all aspects of designing, delivering and managing adult literacy work is of prime importance in bridging the gap between policy and implementation;
- New and additional resources are necessary to implement adult literacy, from government budgets, regional and international donors, and private sector partners.

In support of these actions, the following are among the specific measures proposed by the Conference:

- To call upon the Arab Summit, which will take place in Saudi Arabia in 2007, to put literacy high on its agenda and to support a regional programme for literacy;
- To propose the establishment of a regional fund to support effective programmes and new initiatives for literacy, both for governments and NGOs;
- To urge national governments of the region to undertake concrete follow-up to implement the recommendations of the conference;
- To ask UNESCO to set up a regional working group, bringing all actors together to support the follow-up of the conference;
- To call upon the international community to prioritize the protection of education in crisis and post-conflict situations in particular in Iraq. In this context, the UNESCO working group on crisis and post-conflict situations should focus particularly on designing modalities for the protection of teachers and students in Iraq.

Part 2: SYNTHESIS OF CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

Opening Ceremony

Al Mirqab Ballroom

Master of Ceremony

Dr. Abdulla Al-Thani

Panelists

Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Missned
First Lady, Qatar

His Excellency Dr. Musa Bin Jafaar Bin Hassan
President of the UNESCO General Conference and Permanent
Delegate of the Sultanate of Oman to UNESCO

Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura
Director-General, UNESCO

Ms. Mehriban Aliyeva
First Lady of Azerbaijan and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador

Ms. Widad Babiker
First Lady of Sudan

Ms. Asma Al-Assad
First Lady of Syria

Ms. Andree Lahoud
First Lady of Lebanon

Exhibit: Enriching Literate Environments

Mr. Tayeb Salih

Introductory Remarks

The speeches that opened the Conference, starting from Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Al-Missned's substantive welcome remarks and ending with an introduction to the exhibit 'Enriching Literate Environments', underscored several themes that run through subsequent sessions:

Significance of Literacy

The opening session emphasized the value of literacy as a means to enable people to understand and cope with the challenges of their environment, acquire knowledge and build societies based on it, and put themselves in the service of society and the world. As the foundation of all education and source of individual empowerment, literacy is deemed necessary for alleviating hunger and poverty, and hence, must be construed as the first pillar of development. Against the backdrop of conflicts that beset the region, literacy is also a prerequisite to developing seeds of tolerance, building a culture of dialogue, peace and coexistence. After all, literacy entails going beyond the 3Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) to learning human values such as freedom, equality, justice and the right to differ. Depriving citizens of their right to education (and literacy conceived broadly) foments hatred, envy, and violence.

The importance given to literacy in the Muslim world is not new. The first literacy campaign in the history of Islam, which might very well have been the first literacy campaign in the world, is said to have

extolled Muslims to "read in the name of Allah" and to "pay ransom for life by teaching one person". Accordingly, reading and writing are sacred tasks for Muslims because it is not possible for them to engage the world meaningfully without these skills. Moreover, the joy of literacy is said to have no equal in the world: its light shines through in people who discover their ability to read.

Scope and Definition of Literacy

The opening session highlighted the need for a much broader concept of literacy. Apart from the acquisition of rudimentary skills such as reading and writing, policy-makers and practitioners ought, according to the speakers, to focus as well on cultural, technological, information/media, and religious literacy. It is unfortunate that the Arab world is still focusing on basic literacy when other regions are now using a more complex definition of literacy. Moreover, it is deemed timely to depart from a compartmentalized approach to literacy and adopt a more holistic vision of a literate society, which is in harmony with contemporary discourses on literacy and learning for life.

Literacy challenges facing the Arab states

The main challenge facing the Arab states is the relatively high proportion of people who can neither read nor write. While significant progress has been achieved in improving basic literacy levels, about 58 million or 37% of the adult population in the Arab region cannot read or write. Two out of three people in this category are women. The region, however, is marked by large differentials in literacy rates, with countries like Mauritania, Morocco, and Yemen having literacy rates of about 50%, which is slightly lower than the average rate, while in Kuwait, Jordan, and Qatar 85-90% of their population is able to read or write. Aggravating the situation is the problem of more than 6 million children in the region who are currently out of school.

Given the relatively low average literacy rate in the Arab region, the urgency of the problem is not lost on the speakers. There is no choice, according to them, but to do something about the "scourge of illiteracy". The only option is to make literacy a strategic element of sustainable development and this option is irreversible. It demands political will to face the literacy challenge, especially among women, who are in a position in their families to build advocacy for literacy among the future generation. Moreover, the fight for literacy is no less important than current efforts to thwart global warming or tackle the HIV and AIDs disease.

The importance of political will is demonstrated eloquently by the Qatar experience. The successful implementation of the country's national literacy and education plan was the result of solid political will, backed by financial resources and adequate institutions. The Emir of the State of Qatar led the education reform process, boldly launching initiatives aimed at achieving modernity through education.

Conference Goals

Against this backdrop, the speakers reiterated the aims of the Conference, which are to

- lay the groundwork for concrete support in a country's literacy advocacy by presenting and disseminating innovative and effective literacy practices;
- identify and discuss main challenges and achievements in literacy and developing recommendations on the way forward;
- build cooperation among stakeholders; and
- mobilize partners and resources for concrete interventions at the country level.

It is hoped that the Conference results will feed into the mid-term review of the UN Literacy Decade to be submitted in 2008 and into the preparations for CONFINTEA VI (International Conference on Adult Education) in May 2009.

Roundtable Discussion I: Literacy Policies and Strategies, Cost and Finance

Chair:

His Excellency Dr. Mongi Bousina (Director-General, ALECSO)

Moderator:

Dr. Regina Bendokat (Human Development Advisor, MENA Region, World Bank)

Panelists:

Dr. Abdelwahid A. Yousif (Sudan)

Dr. Sobhi Tawil (UNESCO Rabat)

Dr. Hassan R. Hammoud (Lebanon)

Mr. David Archer (Action Aid, UK)

The Roundtable Discussion provided an overview of the current state of literacy in the Arab region and the areas where progress has been made, policy and programme interventions, gaps in strategies and implementation, and recommendations for successful policy and the benchmarking of adult literacy.

Definition of Literacy

There is a consensus of the need to review the concept of literacy in light of development requirements including its role in poverty reduction. It also encompasses language and computer skills and other relevant skills needed to cope with the demands of modern society and fully participate in all aspects of life. Such relevant skills include critical consciousness of the contradictions in society; understanding of and ability to improve one's working and living conditions; and the ability to develop one's knowledge

and potential for participating more effectively within one's socio-political, economic and cultural context.

Confining literacy to the acquisition of basic skills exclusive of life and problem solving skills — e.g. health information, environmental information, livelihood skills training, civic education and human rights, information technology and education, income generating activities and credit schemes — that help people “function fully and effectively as possible in their various roles as citizens, parents, community members, and workers”⁷, makes it walk in the shadow of the education system.

Progress and Current State of Literacy in the Region⁸

In 1980, the literacy rate of the population 15 years old and over in thirteen Arab countries ranged from 20% to 55% and from 65% to 72% in six others. By 2005, however, overall literacy had increased remarkably to a range between 6.7% and 21.1% in ten countries (Jordan, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Syria, and Libya) and varied between 25% and 30% in three others—Algeria, Djibouti, and Tunisia. Six countries—Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, Egypt, Sudan, and Yemen, are still burdened by illiteracy rates of over 35%, with Iraq and Mauritania being overburdened by 60% of its population being illiterate.

To date, the literacy rates in eight out of fifteen countries in the region for which data are available—Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Palestinian Autonomous Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Syria (which are all relatively small states except for Saudi Arabia and Syria) are higher than the average of developing countries adult literacy rate of 77%. Seven other countries—Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia—fall below this average, with Mauritania, Morocco, and Sudan⁹ standing as low as 51.2%, 50.7%, and 59.0%, respectively. Without over generalizing because of the great diversities, the Arab region has some of the world's lowest adult literacy rates, with a low 62.7% (as opposed to 77% for the developing world) unable to read and write.

Regarding female literacy rates, one out of four women in almost half of the Arab countries were literate in 1980. By 2005, the situation improved tremendously in six countries—Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, UAE and Qatar) with rates ranging from 80% to 90%. Another group - Libya and Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Oman, Syria, and Tunisia - had brought up their female literacy rate to a range of 60% to 75%. Females in four other countries - Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, and Yemen—did not fare any better though. Their literacy rates are still as low as 25% to 55%.

The overall improvement in female literacy among women 15 years old and above age has stagnated somewhat because of a decline in political commitment on appropriate approaches to rectify the problem¹⁰. Female illiteracy is, thus, on the increase, a situation that

⁷ UN Literacy Decade (2003) p. 20 as cited in Hammoud, Hassan. Literacy Strategy for the Arab World. Paper presented at the 12-14 March 2007 Doha Conference.

⁸ This section draws primarily from the paper and presentation of Dr. Hammoud. For a review of the state of literacy and adult education in Bahrain, Egypt, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, see Part II of Yousif, Adlewahid. Adult Literacy and Education in Seven Arab States. Paper presented at the 12-14 March 2007 Doha Conference.

is not expected to change much by the year 2015 according to the UNDP Arab Human Development Report.

As to addressing literacy among the younger population, most governments in the region have made significant strides in extending access to basic education. However, the region is characterized by great underlying variations at the country level based on factors such as population size where a small country like Qatar has 6000 out-of-school children while a large country like Egypt has about 1,610,679 children of school age who are not in school. Quite disturbing is the situation in countries like Sudan where 2,700,000 children are out-of-school.

Regarding the education of girls, the Arab region has achieved much progress in terms of school enrollment. Girls in the Arab world are said to stand better chances than those in West Africa or South Asia. Apart from girls, particular sectors are vulnerable to lack of access to formal schooling, dropping out, and, consequently, to illiteracy: the rural population, the nomads, and the disabled, whose numbers are increasing due to the violence in Algeria, Sudan, Iraq and Palestine. In summary, based on literacy and illiteracy rates, the countries in the Arab region can be classified into three groups:

- The 'literacy abundant' countries composed of Libya and the Gulf states with the exception of Saudi Arabia, all characterized by limited size with small populations and abundant financial resources; Lebanon and Jordan also belong to this group;
- Countries on track towards attaining acceptable levels of literacy: Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and Algeria;
- The 'literacy deprived' countries are composed of Egypt, Mauritania, Iraq, Yemen, Djibouti, Morocco, and Sudan.

Policy and Programme Interventions

The success of the 'literacy abundant' countries may be attributed to several literacy policies, strategies, and programmes. The Gulf States, for instance, provide free and compulsory education and a system of incentives and awards. In Bahrain, no government job can be obtained without a certificate proving the completion of literacy courses. Bahrain and Jordan facilitate the enrollment in flexible programmes by offering afternoon and evening classes.

In Oman, Lebanon and Libya, the partnership between government and civil society groups is considered an important reason for their relative success in addressing the problem of illiteracy. Moreover, education and literacy are high in the national agendas of these countries. The political commitment at the highest levels in countries like Jordan, for instance, provided the sustained support and necessary funding to develop a ten-year policy framework with middle- and long-term goals to achieve educational reform.

Although the second and third group of countries need to move up literacy in the national agenda and make universal primary education

a political priority at the highest level, effort to integrate literacy action to broader development concerns and improved quality of basic education in 'literacy deprived countries' like Mauritania and Morocco, are notable. Since poverty reduction is the challenge in these two countries and in other parts of the region, literacy and basic education strategies are integrated into poverty reduction measures. The literacy strategies in Morocco are articulated around the goal of integrated social development, thus they run through other programmes as well. In Mauritania, the patterns of school drop outs and the role of formal and informal education in the sustained development of literacy has resulted in significant progress in ensuring access to Grade I and gender equity.

For the region as a whole, greater awareness of the seriousness of the literacy situation has led to several measures. In January 2000 the Arab Ministers of Education met in Cairo to discuss the "Framework for Action" to ensure basic learning needs in the Arab States in the years 2000–2010. They agreed that literacy and gender equality were a priority on their agenda for action. The Framework also considers literacy a national responsibility in every country that requires the coordinated efforts of all sectors: governmental and non-governmental, public and private.

Gap between Policy and Implementation: the Challenges

The Roundtable Discussion noted that indeed there is no doubt regarding the political commitment of Arab countries in addressing the literacy challenge as manifested in their active commitment to the above framework and other international declarations. However, translating these commitments into plans of action and making existing programmes work has remained a major challenge.

The formulation and implementation of adult education programmes is of particular concern. Whether policy commitments have an impact on the situation of funding and resource generation for adult literacy is a big question. The problem lies in the misconception that adult literacy is only the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. This logic, and the fact that literacy has walked in the shadow of formal education under existing Ministries of Education, have resulted in scarcity of resources, which, in turn, have compromised the quality and results of adult literacy programmes. The drop-out rate in literacy classes, which is not tracked systematically, is alarmingly high, ranging from 16% to 60%. Since adult illiteracy is a societal problem, more than one ministry should participate in eradicating it. Even the private sector must be involved.

The implementation of most literacy programmes in the region bogged down because of a number of reasons: the lack of financial and human resources, the adoption of inappropriate techniques to stimulate the interest of targeted groups, poor quality teaching due to lack of appropriate training, and the low motivation of learners and staff. The limited use of traditional learning institutions to

⁹ In South Sudan, which is coming out of a 25-year lasting conflict, illiteracy rates among adults are estimated to be higher than 80%.

¹⁰ Hammoud citing Swift, D. (2003). "Tackling Female Illiteracy in Arab Countries". *Critical Issues in Education for All: Gender Parity, Emergencies*. TUVSULA, Helsinki, UNESCO Paris, June.

develop literacy skills in a functional manner, the bureaucratic system of managing adult literacy programmes that are often modeled on the formal primary education system, and the lack of interest of universities and research institutions in adult education problems continue to constrain the desired outcomes of such programmes.

International Benchmarks on Adult Literacy

How to translate policy into action by designing effective adult education programmes that address some of the problems noted above entail setting simple benchmarks. Archer proposed the benchmarks that facilitate planning to achieve the Dakar goal 4 of a 50% increase in adult literacy rates by 2015. Developed by experts from around the world, the following benchmarks affirm that the success of any literacy programme depends on flexibility to respond to unique local needs and circumstances:

- Literacy is about the acquisition and use of reading, writing and numeracy skills, and, thereby, the development of active citizenship, improved health and livelihoods, and gender equality;
- Literacy must be seen as a continuous process that requires sustained learning and acquisition; there are no magic lines to cross from illiteracy to literacy;
- Governments have the lead responsibility in meeting the right to adult literacy and in providing leadership, policy frameworks, an enabling environment, and resources;
- It is important to invest in ongoing feedback and evaluation mechanisms, data systematization, and research;
- To retain facilitators, it is important that they be paid at least the equivalent of the minimum wage of a primary school teacher;
- Facilitators should be local people who receive substantial initial training and regular refresher training as well as having ongoing opportunities for exchanges with other facilitators;
- There should be a ratio of at least one facilitator to 30 learners and at least one trainer/supervisor to 15 learner groups (1 to 10 in remote areas)
- In multilingual contexts, it is important at all stages that learners be given an active choice about the language in which they learn;
- A wide range of participatory methods should be used in the learning process to ensure active engagement of learners and relevance to their lives;
- Governments should take responsibility for stimulating the market for production and distribution of a wide variety of materials suitable for new readers by working with publishers and newspaper producers;
- A good quality literacy programme that respects these benchmarks would cost between \$50 to \$100 per learner per year for at least three years;
- Governments should dedicate at least 3% of their national education sector budgets to adult literacy programmes.

The Roundtable Discussion underscored the importance of several useful inputs to policy and resource generation for literacy programmes:

- the adoption of a broader notion of literacy that is consistent with current discourses on education, lifelong learning, and sustainable development;
- the reliability and validity of statistics which are often lowered or increased depending upon what the countries want to show;
- the appropriate documentation and evaluation of successful innovations¹¹;
- the need to obtain support of ministries of finance;
- the development of regional mechanisms for private sector and NGO involvement; and
- the revival of the Arab Fund for literacy to support the weaker segments of the Arab community.

Roundtable Discussion II: Programme Delivery

Chair:

His Excellency Dr. Ali Abdul Khaliq Alkarni (Director General of the Bureau of Education for the Gulf States)

Moderator:

Dr. Aicha Barki, President, IQRAA (Algeria)

Panelists:

Ms. Sabah Al-Haidous (Qatar)

Dr. Laila Iskander (Egypt)

Dr. Madiha Al-Shaibani (Oman)

Dr. Emad Tharwat Khalil (Egypt)

The Roundtable II is premised on the critical role of programme delivery in the global literacy initiative. Organizationally, Arab states have either established Adult Literacy or Adult Learning departments or ministries housed either within the Ministries of Education or reporting directly to the Prime Minister or Cabinet of Ministers. Programme management has been decentralized in response to the difficulty of managing programmes because of geographic dispersion, regional variations, and linguistic diversity. However, decentralization of government structures, accordingly, has not led to innovations in programme design, development, or implementation.

The few countries in the Arab region that have linked literacy, development, and education have adopted a strong partnership with civil society groups, notably community-based organizations. Such links are perceived to be a source of strength in content design, production, and programme delivery.

Teachers and facilitators are poorly trained in most Arab states. Teacher credentialing is not required and use of local community facilitators and local formal school teachers is universally practiced.

¹¹ E.g. innovations on non-formal education for girls in the Arab Region such as the one-room community schools in Egypt; female education in Al Saragena district in Morocco; educating the nomadic Bedouins in Sudan; the Open University in Libya, Saudi Arabia's training programme on post-literacy for girls; and the UNLIT pilot project in Lebanon.

Deployment of qualified teachers to remote areas has also been very challenging, making it necessary to rely on voluntarism in servicing the needs of the poor.

Regarding curriculum and teaching materials, all countries have a standardized examination offered by the national adult literacy agency which is used to measure the acquisition of literacy. This is the case even if there are numerous curricula and teaching materials reflecting community needs and interests, especially in countries that have adopted a decentralized and community-based approach. Attractive, interesting, relevant and suitable post-literacy learning materials are few.

Some overall features of designing effective programmes are:

- recognition that the acquisition of literacy is fundamentally about initiating and sustaining an empowering process of individual growth and development;
- learner motivation, reinforced by the connection between the content of the programme and their daily lives,
- the integration of basic reading and writing skills into a broad range of development objectives;
- innovation as essential in designing programmes and content that breed a desire for literacy;
- shift away from a traditional teacher-led classroom instruction.

Curriculum Development

- the tailoring of the curricula to the situation of working students who have concrete needs;
- linking of the curriculum to development at local and national levels although issues of democracy and political participation have not figured significantly in the education curriculum;
- a relatively open curriculum that takes the specificities of the learner into account;
- an interdisciplinary literacy curriculum exposing the learner to multidisciplinary aspects of development;
- incorporation of ICT or e-learning in the curriculum where applicable.

Language, Pedagogical Approaches, and Teaching Materials

- Multilingual teaching in multilingual societies and the use of the mother tongue in early childhood and the first few years of primary education to strengthen children's ability to learn;
- Learner-oriented and participative pedagogies that aim to enable the learners to be autonomous and independent;
- Use of stories, drawing, and singing that take the issues relevant to the learner in his or her environment into account and the forging of linkages with organizations on the ground;
- Building on the experiences of illiterates and encouraging them to express themselves through group thinking;

- Use of technology to keep students interested and add to their skills;
- Allowing learners to self-evaluate.

Selection and Training of Teachers and Literacy Workers

- Teacher training and evaluation along learner-centered competencies;
- Adjustment of teaching to the teacher's individual needs while developing evaluation criteria of teacher performance that includes measures of autonomy and independence;
- The need to review the strengths and weaknesses of various training methods.

A final point addressed to potential donors, based on experience in Egypt, Yemen, and Sudan, is the need to allocate more funds for the training of teachers and literacy facilitators.

Summary of Discussions in Break-Out Sessions: Literacy Policies, Costs, and Finance

What is the level of demand for literacy? Should there be a minimum standard which is provided to everyone? There may be arguments in some countries like Morocco for a large-scale campaign to bring everyone up to a minimum standard while a demand-based approach may be more appropriate to post-literacy. Demand for literacy may depend on the quality of the programme: where quality is high, so is the demand. Obtaining a quick benefit from literacy may be a pre-requisite to the participation of the poor. To address the unarticulated demand of poor individuals who might be interested but could not afford the opportunity cost of a literacy programme, it may be necessary to provide subsidies or food rations. The diversification of programmes is, in fact, desirable, considering the observation from experience that a single or one-track programme has had little impact on the promotion of literacy.

Political will seems to be a key issue. In this regard, governments need to adopt policies and assume responsibility for adult literacy, but in ways that enable programmes to function at the community level since the literature reveals that decentralization seems to work best for most social programmes. To convince policy makers to be serious about literacy strategies, it is necessary to compile national dossiers that demonstrate the benefits and overall impact of adult literacy.

In some countries, the scale of the literacy challenge is such that even where there is political will to address it, funds may be insufficient. Where donors are reluctant to include adult literacy in educational financing, adult literacy must be shown to be a government priority

and donors should align with it. On the other hand, where donor money is involved, sustainability needs consideration.

Where does the private sector fit in all this? Members of one break-out group thought that wealthy businessmen in the region could finance literacy with hundreds of millions of dollars. The group also supported the idea of reviving the Arab Literacy Fund for literacy deprived countries and sectors that could not afford to promote literacy as vigorously as they wish.

Way to Go:

In future planning, the break-out group proposed that the following issues to be taken into consideration:

- Diversification of literacy programmes with respect to content, methods of delivery, and medium of learning;
- Partnership with the private sector, media, NGOs, beneficiaries and other stakeholders;
- The need to prioritize capacity building that includes a wide range of actors including policy makers, community leaders, trainers, teachers, and all types of beneficiaries;
- The development of a networking mechanism in the Arab region to facilitate sharing of experiences and best practices across states;
- The enhancement of coordination to avoid the duplication of efforts that characterize the existing do-it-alone approach;
- The need to develop literacy programmes for mothers;
- Institutionalization of a system of monitoring and evaluation of literacy programmes and the establishment of an EMIS for literacy;
- The incorporation of the idea of a special literacy fund into the formulation of literacy strategies.

Programme Delivery

The discussion in the break-out session on programme delivery focused on three concerns: the importance of scaling up literacy programmes; the balance between uniform standards for literacy programmes and diversity; and the role of NGOs in literacy programmes.

There was a general consensus on the need to scale up literacy programmes¹². The break-out group noted the experience of Turkey's ACEV, which reaches as many as 60,000 parents annually. This experience and that of similar programmes reveal that scaling up entails that programmes become more structured, rule-based and have some form of central management, or at the very least, coordination, even as the organizations giving life to them firmly advocate flexibility. Does scaling up then mean the provision of a standard package? In some countries, standardization at the national level gives structure and framework. However, flexibility characterizes implementation at the local level. Balancing

standards and flexibility is necessary considering the learner-centered philosophy that underlies the call for their involvement in programme design and delivery. Some of the participants argued that requiring standard criteria might kill initiatives and undermine creativity.

The responsibility for literacy, particularly at the policy level, falls squarely on government. Nevertheless, non-government organizations have a role to play, given that illiteracy is a societal problem and different sectors ought to do their share. Thus far, their contributions in the implementation of literacy programmes have been notable¹³. Two additional points were raised, however, in the discussion of NGO involvement. First, are there real NGOs in the Arab world? And second, NGOs ought to also assist in teacher training prior to adult education work.

Simultaneous Sessions Panel Discussion I: Mother-Child Literacy and Intergenerational Learning

Chair:

Her Excellency Vigdis Finnbogadóttir,
UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador

Moderator:

Dr. Richard Wilkins, Doha Institute for Family Studies and Development, Qatar

Panelists:

Dr. Nadim Karam, Lebanon
Ms. Derya Akalin, Turkey
Mr. Farid Abu Khtesh, Palestinian Territories
Dr. Julie Hadeed, Bahrain

The Panel organized its presentation of four effective programmes in mother-child literacy and intergenerational learning along the following questions:

- What are the unique and innovative aspects of your organization?
- What are the particular outcomes of your programme and why do you think these are the outcomes?
- What opportunities do you see for your programme in the future?

Turkey's Mother Child Education Programme (MCEP): A Preschool Programme Promoting Literacy for Children and Mothers, ACEV

The MCEP is a low-cost, home-based programme that the Turkish ACEV (Mother Child Education Foundation) started on a pilot scale in the 1980s. After joint implementation over a number of

¹² Among the programmes that were proposed to be replicated and scaled up the following were mentioned: The creative use of libraries in providing good reading materials for parents and children; and advocacy for parents to read to their children, convincing them of the powerful impact of engaging parents in the learning process.

¹³ In countries like Morocco, NGOs, who know their communities best and are recognized by government, have been in an excellent position to design curricula that are attuned to the diversity of needs on the ground.

years, ACEV handed over to Ministry of Education. Currently still implemented as a training programme within the framework of the Ministry of National Education, it is a successful example of collaboration between a non-governmental organization and the state. It has benefited at least 213,500 disadvantaged mothers and children all over the country.

The programme was developed to empower mothers to perform their educator role by equipping them with the knowledge and tools necessary for fostering the cognitive and literacy development of their children. In addition to discussion groups, lectures, and role-playing methods are used and home visits conducted to ensure the success of the programme. The programme, costing around US\$100 to US\$200 per mother-child tandem for 25 weeks, has a monitoring and evaluation component, and has proven its scalability.

The MCEP has been evaluated four times with positive and sustained results. On the whole, children with mothers who attended the programme performed better than those outside the programme. They adapted more quickly to school routines and requirements, acquired literacy skills faster and stayed in school longer. Their mothers, on the other hand, developed the habit of reading, felt personally empowered, spent quality time with their children at an early age, and were more aware of the need to support their development. ACEV is also successfully running a Father Support Programme targeting literate fathers who have children between the ages of 2 to 10.

Bahrain's Mother-Child Home Education Programme (MOCEP)

Proof of the scalability of ACEV's Mother Child Programme in Turkey beyond its national borders, is the research-based, home intervention empowerment programme in Bahrain. Founded in 1999 along the MCEP model, Bahrain's MOCEP operates over a longer 8-month period and consists of 32 (instead of 25) weekly discussions and lectures and 32 weeks of cognitive training under the supervision of a professional. The mother supervises the children's learning activities daily, using the materials developed by the programme.

Research on MOCEP shows that children with interventions had significantly higher IQs (spatial reasoning and verbal ability). Their self-concept and self-esteem rates were also higher than those who did not benefit from the programme. In addition, these children had less behavioral problems and were less dependent on their mothers. Their mothers, on the other hand, were more attentive to their needs, were more calm, less harsh and authoritarian, and provided more stimulation for learning. The quality and success of MOCEP is attributed by those who sustain its implementation to the professional training of their staff, with their research showing that the longer the training, the

higher the success rate. The main challenge faced by MOCEP is its sustainability.

Lebanon's UNLIT

Initiated by UNESCO, UNLIT encourages universities to be socially committed and advocates a literacy concept that is embedded within community development interventions. Its emphasis is to build awareness and insights about the legal needs of communities and the importance of literacy. UNLIT also underscores the importance of consensus building in terms of needs and strategies among various groups (e.g. students, universities, professors, UNESCO, funding organizations).

UNLIT achieved its literacy goals while building support systems within families, enhancing the resources (i.e. time) they devoted to literacy acquisition, minimizing, if not avoiding, the stigma of illiteracy especially among males, and building partnerships. The major challenges raised in the Panel for UNLIT include the need to increase partnerships and expand the base for resource generation; to view development in a more holistic way, and to cope with the changes in the community where the programme operates.

Palestine's Trust of Programmes for Early Childhood, Family and Community Education (TPECFCE)

Started in 1984, the TPECFCE is a programme that reflects strong NGO presence in Palestine in the absence of government interventions. Focused on literacy acquisition among 8-10 year old school drop-outs, the programme initially addressed the hostility that marked the relations between the home and the school. At the core of this programme is the belief that mothers as guides will pass on to their children what they themselves have learned. This belief is translated in the training of mothers to be the 'candle of the caravan going through the desert'.

The programme has contributed to improving literacy and much more. Mothers have taken the lead in ensuring that family members assume roles in the learning environment of the home. Among the unintended outcomes of the programme are the discovery of the wisdom of the 'ignorant'; the extent of neglect and abuse of children in home contexts; and domestic violence that led to the design of new programmes that among other goals help prevent early marriage. The challenges and opportunities faced by TPECFCE include limited funds for social change and the mindset of donors that demands quick changes for participatory processes that take time to root and produce tangible outcomes.

Panel Discussion II: Literacy for Health

Chair:

Mr. Mark Richmond, Division for the Coordination of UN Priorities in Education, UNESCO

Moderator:

Dr. Ramadan Hamed Mohamed,
American University of Cairo, Egypt

Panelists:

Mr. Salah Sabri Sebeh, Egypt
Dr. Perri Klass, USA
Ms. Malini Ghose, India

The Chair opened the session by noting that literacy and health may be tackled along any of four dimensions:

- health care as content of literacy learning
- health care as an opportunity for literacy learning
- health care as a factor for effective learning; and
- improved health care as an outcome of literacy learning.

The panel shared the features of effective programmes that touched mainly on the first three dimensions. All three programmes target deprived groups and attempt to break the cycle of poverty, illness and illiteracy through health-related development activities. Moreover, all of them deviate from a standardized service delivery format by providing flexible packages suited to the different needs and motives of illiterates.

The **Reach Out and Read Programme (United States)** works through pediatricians and other providers of health care to young children, especially children growing up in poverty. At each checkup from six months to five years of age, a child receives a new developmentally appropriate book to take home. Now reaching over 2.6 million children, doctors underscore, through this programme, the importance of parents reading aloud to young children. The programme trains health care providers to talk with parents about looking at books with their children, in order to help them associate the books with the pleasure of being with the parent.

Studies have shown that by doing so, parents have read aloud to their kids more frequently and the language of children covered by the programme was significantly better by 18 months of age compared to those without the programme's intervention. A major challenge, however, is that many of the parents are not themselves highly literate or comfortable with books and reading;

The **Women Empowerment Literacy-based Programme** implemented by **Nirantar**, a resource center for gender and education in New Delhi (India) aims to empower women and adolescent girls through literacy and education activities. Initiated in 2002, the programme organizes village-level education centers and camps, conducts health education sessions in these centers/camps, and produces a broadsheet with the participation of learners.

Linking health issues, the programme concentrates in its first phase on literacy learning around health concerns that women themselves identify as relevant to them. Lessons exploring social issues such as taboos, discrimination around food, and corruption in the provision of cooked meals, among others are also incorporated. The result is greater confidence among programme beneficiaries to engage in the public sphere. Among the challenges faced by the programme are lack of resources, an environment that is not conducive to learning, the difficulty of finding good facilitators lack of incentives for them, and lack of means to ascertain the sustainability of literacy efforts.

CARITAS Education Programme (Egypt) aims to reach illiterates in poor and disadvantaged areas. Started in 1972, the programme covers three areas: the acquisition of reading and writing skills, the raising of health awareness and the development of civic education and citizenship. The teaching methodology is based on the choice of words related to every day life. The health awareness aspect of CARITAS emerged in response to the low enrollment of women due to various health problems. The programme, hence, was designed to include classes supervised by doctors that use a practical approach and cover four themes: general health, nutrition, reproductive health and environmental protection.

A major issue raised in the panel is that of sustainability, in particular financial sustainability since funding is generally short-term. Other issues discussed in the open forum include the lack of literacy books and learning materials.

Panel Discussion III: Enriching Literate Environments: Culture, Reading, Publishing

Chair:

Dr. Aly Amer, IRA, Egypt

Moderator:

Dr. Clinton Robinson, UNESCO

Panelists:

Dr. Najwa Adra, Yemen
Dr. Margo Malatjalian, Jordan
Ms. Renad Qubbaj, Palestinian Territories

The panel discussion was organized around the following questions:

- How can newly acquired literacy skills be actually used and enhanced?
- What kind of reading material and books are produced for new readers?
- How is writing linked to consolidating these newly acquired skills?
- To what extent does the socio-political and cultural context influence the development of a literate environment?

Sustaining Literacy

The panellists shared their experiences in enhancing and sustaining literacy. **Yemen's Literacy through Poetry Project**, for instance, developed modalities that encouraged adults, youth, and children to record stories and songs from their own cultural heritage in their dialect, and, in a second phase, in Arabic. Underlying this approach is the idea that people can contribute to the creation of their own literate environments even as they are just acquiring literacy skills. The uniqueness of the Literacy through Poetry Project lies in its assumption that literacy can be sustained, and, critical thinking fostered, by enriching the literate environment through the preservation of the neo-literates' cultural heritage.

The Tamer Institute for Community Education, on the other hand, implements a variety of activities which all encourage new readers to develop the pleasure of reading. "My First Book" competition, for example, is a yearly event, announced in all the **Palestinian** newspapers, that encourages children in difficult circumstances to write a text based on a topic of their choice. The children have usually focused on the Israeli occupation and the effects of tightened security and roadblocks on their lives. The Tamer Institute also is also pursuing a UNESCO-supported project that encourages the use of newly acquired literacy skills in the development of local heritage and culture. Implemented in three cities, the project organized teams of young people to collect stories coming from their oral tradition.

Book Production

Jordan's Association for Reading for Children, which was established in 1975, reveals that there are available books circulating in the Arab world. Unfortunately, most of them have been translated from other languages and Arab children are said to undervalue their own books and culture. The Association however aims to produce quality books that are based on local content.

Stressing the importance of developing reading skills in classical Arabic, the Association advocates the mobilization of a pool of great writers in the Arab world in the production of children's books, which, at the moment, the cultural industry has not deemed fit to exploit. The use of a children's section in daily newspapers is also encouraged. Since the Arabic language and its transmission to children is a common bond among countries in the Arab world, the Association, moreover, proposes collaboration among publishers in the Arab world.

Access to Books

The Tamer Institute also publishes in large numbers and distributes books for free throughout the Palestinian Territory. In addition to opening access to children's books to everyone, the Tamer Institute is also working on more proactive and child-friendly libraries that use drama and theatre.

In **Jordan**, Dr. Malatjalian's publishing work flowed naturally from

her efforts to promote literacy and reading. Her work included advocacy for the activation of 35 public libraries in Amman. In this process she conducted workshops for teachers that train the children to use books, to make reading fun and develop other social skills. It also entailed the creation of mobile libraries to reach children with special needs such as those in hospitals.

Whether one speaks of traditional or special libraries or of making homes literate environments, a major challenge is the high cost of book production, making it imperative to explore ways of bringing the cost down, including the provision of subsidies. Another way of bringing costs down is to use the Internet. International publishers can also be encouraged to publish Arab content with universal value for export within the region. The Palestinian experience shows that learning environments can be enhanced with minimal resources through neighborhood-based interventions.

Identity, Culture and Literacy

In the Arab world, oral tradition offers a means for conflict resolution, sharing of opinions, and personal empowerment. The Literacy through Poetry Project has encouraged women, who have not always been in a position to articulate their thoughts, to use songs and poems to express themselves and to do so without fear. This has especially been important given the rise of religious fundamentalism and television viewing that threatens free expression.

The panel noted that both reading and writing are means to develop and nurture the critical spirit. Learning how to see things in a new light opens up possibilities and enables the learner to make decisions. Thus, it is very important to continue both the production of quality books for children and adults and the use of innovative ways of sustaining interest in reading and writing, and, thereby, linking orality and literacy. The specific circumstances of Palestine, an occupied nation, make it imperative to preserve its cultural heritage in both its oral and written forms.

How to make the Literate Environment Richer

The panel discussion recommended measures at different levels and for various actors that include the following:

- Conduct of national campaigns to collect, document, and preserve oral and written literature;
- Sustained efforts by NGOs and other actors to publish readable books and reading materials for and by young people in the region, especially those living in rural areas and other marginalized children¹⁴;
- Sustained efforts as well in making the learning materials accessible to a wider public;
- Government support for publishing ventures through 'tax exemption';
- Donor-support for more long-term initiatives, whether they be the publication of learning materials or specific activities that build up to a richer literate environment.

¹⁴ e.g. SOLO Sudan; Questscope, Jordan

Panel Discussion IV: Literacy for Economic Self-Sufficiency

Chair:

Her Royal Highness Princess Firyal, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador

Moderator:

Dr. Adama Ouane, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

Panelists:

Ms. Rashida Abdel Mutalib, Sudan

Dr. Curtis Rhodes Jr., Jordan

Ms. Mounia Benchekroun, Morocco

Mr. Ali Zainal and Dr. Rabia Kerzabi, Qatar/Mauritania

Reflecting on the experiences of the **Sudan Open Learning Organisation (SOLO)**, **Jordan's Questscope for Social Development in the Middle East**, **Morocco's Fondation Zakoura Education**, and the **Qatar/Mauritania Project "Alphabétisation et formation professionnelle"**, the panel explored the links among literacy and economic self-sufficiency.

Economic Self-sufficiency and Literacy

The Sudanese SOLO defines economic self-sufficiency as a sustainable development process which aims to address the social problems of a community. Based on a participatory approach, the attainment of economic self-sufficiency entails an analysis, in conjunction with the community, of the issues that constrain development as well as a range of possible solutions. Literacy workers facilitate dialogue, the articulation of the community's problems and the subsequent organization of its people, and, in the process help learners acquire literacy skills.

SOLO reported that about half of its beneficiaries have relapsed to illiteracy because of the lack of reading materials. Thus, while the literacy-economic self-sufficiency nexus is important to establish, it is still necessary to enhance the neo-literates' capacity to read and write.

Like Sudan, Morocco has an integrated literacy programme that aims to ensure that all community members achieve a minimum level of literacy; to improve the economic situation of the learner through awareness sessions for girls and women in villages to improve life skills, vocational training, the granting of micro-credit, and assistance in building houses; and to encourage the people to establish a local association with corresponding activities in support of the process of defining projects. Apart from ensuring the links between literacy and economic activities, the need to create a more favorable environment for literacy acquisition and enhancement was also cited as a recommendation how to address these problems.

The strategy of developing entrepreneurship among street children while keeping them out of trouble and, thus, empowering them, was a major highlight of the presentation by Jordan's Questscope. At the core of the strategy is the goal of integrating drop-outs into the education system through learning programmes that would enhance their self-esteem. Such programmes could cover both academic content (50%) and attitude and life skills (50%). What is critical is the

flexibility of the Ministry of Education to allow for the recognition or certification of the skills acquired from such programmes, thus enabling learners to go back to formal education.

The Qatar Foundation-supported literacy project in Mauritania is an example of a collaborative effort between two countries to help turn the illiteracy around. The project opened more than 180 literacy classes in poor and remote areas, where basic infrastructure and services are hardly found. Some of them were mobile to address the literacy needs of nomads. The incorporation of vocational training for the unemployed youth within the project served as major incentives for participants.

Achievements of the Programmes Presented

SOLO reveals that linking of literacy and vocational training made people aspire and work for economic improvement. As this happened, their needs expanded, with the programme expanding its substantive coverage, accordingly. Questscope, on the other hand, has worked to keep about 300 borderline children in its pilot phase within the education system. In Morocco, the panel illustrated the impact of literacy with integrated economic self-sufficiency initiatives using the case of Fatima, a 23-year old learner: literacy facilitated her access to micro-credit, which subsequently made her find her place in society. The Qatar Foundation-Mauritania literacy project reached as many as 4000 beneficiaries to date.

Lessons

The lessons gained by the presenters include the following points:

- Literacy learners are more motivated when programmes also focus on economic self-sufficiency; integrating literacy into life skills and livelihood training, therefore, promises to produce far-reaching results;
- It is also important for people not to be limited to micro-credit. Economic projects of scale ought to also be developed;
- Within a participatory framework, an inclusive, flexible, and client-centered approach demands of literacy and development workers the capacity to listen and to change gears midstream, if necessary;
- Multiple stakeholders from different sectors ought to be involved to ensure the success of integrated literacy and economic programmes;
- The sustainability of projects must be ensured. As much as possible, they should be self-funded;
- The need to explore and link literacy and economic activities among special groups such as prisoners.

Panel Discussion V: ICTs and Literacy

Chair:

Dr. Patrick Baudry, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador

Moderator:

Dr. Raj Reddy, Carnegie Mellon University, Qatar

Panelists:

Dr. Mohamad Adnan Al-Alaoui, Lebanon
 Dr. Mohamad Al-Ansari, Qatar
 Dr. Raafat Radwan, Egypt

The panel discussion is premised on the need to develop capacities to deal with an emerging global society. It looked into the place of radio in literacy programmes in **Mauritania**; the role of computers in helping literacy training in **Lebanon**; and in **Qatar**, the ICT literacy of women. Considering its focus on ICT, the panel also called attention to a shift in learning paradigms, from a traditional approach that is teacher-centered to the use of television, radio or computers for transmitting learning modules. Computer-based learning is said to be interactive, self-paced, autonomous and at times, entertaining.

Inspired by the experience of the Canary Isles, the radio-based functional literacy programme in Mauritania started in 2004. It includes several basic activities: listening to radio broadcasts in the morning and evening four times a week; weekly pedagogical support and assessment; counseling; monitoring of trainers and the learners' individual records; and personalized follow-up of trainees. Interestingly, learners acquire basic and functional literacy in groups of three to six people from the same family or village. On the whole, the programme is relatively successful, with a retention rate of 85% and success rate of 68% in 2006.

In Egypt, a country that is quick to adopt new technologies, even the children of the poor are exposed to ICT. Multimedia literacy education in Egypt evolved from the use of radios in the 1960s, to television in the 1990s, and to computers in the 2000s. Examples of the innovative uses of ICT were students passing on newly acquired skills to older people and disabled who became skillful in the use of personal computers.

In Lebanon computers enable literacy workers to reach out-of-school youth, helping them effectively acquire an integrated set of reading, numeracy, and computer skills. The self-paced learning associated with ICTs allows such youth to take off from where they left off, if ever they drop out of the programme. Moreover, speech recognition and touch screen facilities have made it easier to interact with PCs and to achieve both literacy and computer literacy. Interestingly, these multi-sense approaches have allowed for the development of literacy programmes for groups of people with special needs (e.g., the deaf, the blind, disabled, and dyslexics).

In Qatar, ICT literacy for women is part of a strategic move of the country's Supreme Council for ICT and its Supreme Council for Family Affairs to transform Qatar into a knowledge-based society in the near future. While it targets students, workers, the retired, and the youth, women lie at the heart of this strategy. Its goals are to improve the ICT literacy rate of women, and, in the process, provide them equal access to economic, social and political resources as well as the opportunity to make them economically self-sufficient and healthier.

Among the more salient concerns raised in the discussion were

- 1) ICT's potential role in making parents more involved in their children's learning process regardless of their backgrounds;

- 2) the need to partner with the private sector and obtain its help in providing equipment; and
- 3) the development of a literacy hub in the Arab region as a venue for exchanging experiences.

Panel Discussion VI: Media Literacy

Chair:

Dr. James Reardon-Anderson, Dean, Georgetown University, School of Foreign Service, Qatar

Moderator:

Wadah Khanfar, Director, Al Jazeera International, Qatar

Panelists:

Dr. Magda Abu Fadil, Lebanon
 Dr. Renee Hobbs, USA
 Mr. Richard Gizbert, Qatar

The panel reiterated the need to include in an expanded notion of literacy the scope of digital, visual and electronic media and popular culture. Media literacy is defined as the ability to assess, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms. Three processes are involved in media education: accessing and understanding information from digital and electronic media; evaluating or critically analyze the content; and composing messages using digital media.

Media reflects prevailing realities and values while at the same time performing a transformative function - that is, media facilitate the construction of new realities and values for their multiple audiences. In this connection, the sheer quantity of media exposure in the lives of the next generation and the role media-mediated entertainment and popular culture have assumed in the socialization of the young makes it imperative to vigorously promote media literacy in order to arm audiences, particularly young people, with critical thinking. Without media literacy, people's perceptions and sense of reality can easily be manipulated by powerful and entrenched interests.

In the Arab world, media literacy and awareness have long been neglected, often leading to unfavorable consequences and exacerbating volatile situations. It is necessary to build questioning skills among young Arabs, support creative youth experience, inspire active and informed citizens, and develop self-esteem and respect for others.

Approaches to Media Literacy

Media literacy, as an emergent field, has drawn from theoretical developments in critical literary theory, social constructivism, and the sociology of mass communications. A range of innovative approaches has increased the motivation and engagement of learners; enhanced the quality of student-teacher relationships, improved text comprehension and honed analytical skills, not to mention, basic citizenship skills. The following recommendations were proposed to combat stereotypes and promote intercultural understanding through the promotion of media literacy:

- create media literacy programmes for students and journalists on both sides of the cultural divide;
- institute solid journalism programmes at universities that provide rich curricula that teach not only reporting, editing, photography and blogging but also emphasize media ethics and sensitivity training;
- encourage exchange programmes between students and journalists;
- encourage journalists to contribute to each other's media;
- create networks that provide support and solidarity;
- create unofficial watchdog mechanisms to monitor offensive media; and
- give more voice to women and youth in the media dialogue.

Roundtable Discussion 3: Literacy Interventions For Crisis, Post-Conflict And Emergency Situations

Chair:

Dr. Abdel Moneim Osman, Director, UNESCO Beirut

Moderator:

Dr. Kabir Sheikh, Director, UNRWA/UNESCO Department of Education

Panelists:

Mr. Rashid Al-Naimi (Qatar)

Dr. Mounir Fasheh (Palestinian Territories)

Dr. Mohammed Ali Bile (UNICEF Iraq)

Dr. Qutub Khan (UNESCO Iraq)

For two decades, armed conflicts in the Arab region have thwarted efforts to meet the goals of literacy and education for all. In Iraq, they have devastated both the socio-economic and human infrastructure of the country. Proof of this is the alarming increase in the number of out-of-school children and adult illiterates, especially in rural areas and among the marginalized groups. Although 7 out of 10 adult Iraqis (32%) are literate, 6 out of 10 women are not. Moreover, 7 out of 10 girls are out of school. An absence of norms and standards, materials, coordinated government leadership and an understanding of what literacy is for, mark Iraq's literacy condition.

Like Iraq, Palestine is not a stranger to ideologically-based political conflicts and the social crises they create. The conflicts between Israel and the Palestine territories have had adverse consequences as well for the literacy condition of the nation. Natural disasters such as earthquakes and the tsunami that hit various parts of Asia reflect another form of crisis. Drawing from the interventions in **Iraq** and **Palestine** as well as Qatar's outreach initiatives in **Indonesia** (after the tsunami), **Pakistan** (after the earthquake) and in **Lebanon** the panel discussion was organized around the following questions.

- How can the potential within communities be identified and turn the crisis around?

- How can crisis be used to build and empower communities, particularly its women and children?
- What lessons can be drawn from the programmes in conflict or post-conflict societies?

Qatar Foundation's "Reach out to Asia" Programme

(ROTA) aims to assist stakeholders in particular local communities to overcome educational challenges by utilizing a multi-pronged approach to school-based literacy interventions in Indonesia, Pakistan and in Lebanon. Some of the obstacles were a lack of authority, regulatory framework, and clear operational guidelines in the context of economic instability. ROTA's response was to develop contingency plans based on consultations with all stakeholders and making local community members implement the project in Pakistan. Insufficient administrative capacity to deal with large-scale disasters, lack of coordination among aid donors and the consequent inaccuracy of information about the needs of the population and duplication of efforts were responded by ROTA with local needs assessment.

The UNICEF-supported **IRAQ Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP)**

aims to address the disturbing reality that about one and a half million children, aged 13 to 18 years old are not in school. The programme provides opportunities for older out-of-school children to complete the primary stage of education within a compressed period of three years. Targeting mostly girls, programme delivery was designed to be flexible, with nearly 12000 children benefiting. Targeting people older than 18 years, the programme identified potential volunteer teachers from among those who have completed secondary education. This strategy did not only reduce costs, it was effective. Impact evaluation of programme outcomes reveal that its non-formal character, its links to the realities lived by the learners, and the availability of volunteer teachers made it more effective than the usual structured education delivered in schools.

The presentation on **Palestine** emphasized the importance of people, community, context and cultural expression in literacy campaigns. Instead of dulling the senses and limiting the learners' imagination by approaching literacy as a technical acquisition of skills abstracted from their life world, such campaigns ought to embody wisdom, create intra-knowledge dialogue, and set the imagination and action free. Treating people as co-authors of meaning, the approach that is deemed effective from the Palestinian experience, connects literacy acquisition directly to life—the arts, aesthetics, history, religion, and community. As far as Palestine is concerned, the people best equipped to deal with crisis are those experiencing it and not professionals or experts who see it from a distance.

Crisis as Opportunity to Build Communities

How to avoid eliminating native wisdom and knowledge in the process of developing literacy skills is a major challenge. In the case of the Palestinian Territories, the crisis made them gain an awareness of this challenge.

When the Palestinian Liberation Organization was expelled from Jordan in 1970, Palestinians tapped into their own resources such as friendship groups. Building on hospitality and generosity, such groups flourished and became quite creative. At the end of the day, the closure of all schools and adult learning centers for four years is said to have freed people from the idea of a single, undifferentiated path to learning. Instead of relying on external support for its literacy campaigns, a genuine, community-based and owned initiative promoted teamwork and independence. It is also argued to have proven that success will not be achieved unless a crisis and its solutions are viewed from a different pair of lenses.

Some Lessons Drawn

It is vital for NGOs like Qatar Foundation to have more authority to talk to governments, to change mindsets at the level of government, schools, and parents. In this regard, UNESCO is called to play a key role. It should help develop a good monitoring system that would track changes and ensure the sustainability of efforts. The importance of creating networks among communities in different countries was underlined by the Qatar Foundation's new project of "Twinning Schools". Conflict or post-conflict societies ought to be adept at contingency planning, with planners and literacy workers on the ground making almost weekly adjustments. Given scarce resources, it is important to optimize its use. For instance, classes can be conducted in mosques, under trees, or wherever learners can come together. Innovative and out-of-the-box approaches that are open to different models are necessary. In conflict areas, such programmes ought to incorporate sports and play as mechanisms for dealing with and overcoming stress.

Roundtable Discussion 4: Benchmarking, Monitoring, and Evaluation Of Literacy

Chair:

Dr. Patrick Werquin, Principal Administrator, Directorate for Education, OECD

Moderator:

Dr. Simon Ellis, UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Panelists:

Dr. Adel Al-Sayed, Qatar

Dr. Nadir Al-Habib, Morocco

Dr. Hashim Abuzeid Elsafi, Sudan

Dr. Mohamed Bougroum, Morocco

Stressing the importance of developing literacy monitoring and evaluation systems for purposes of strategic planning, the panel underscored the need for an integrated approach to monitoring and evaluation. In the Arab world, the need to develop benchmarks, result-based evaluation, and an MIS for literacy that would facilitate monitoring of its different aspects at different levels is widely recognized.

A major challenge facing the Arab region is the implementation and further refinement of an integrated monitoring and evaluation approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative measures of literacy. Such an approach reflects different levels of monitoring: 1) internal monitoring through external tests conducted by autonomous agencies¹⁵; 2) assessment of the extent learners use the newly acquired skills; and 3) careful comparison of literacy statistics and other relevant data. It is important to test people directly on measures of literacy and obtain quantitative and qualitative social and environmental data. Detailed description of literacy levels of the population, that incorporate such information as well as any available data on the experiences and knowledge of the learners, are required.

As to sustainability, the development of a statistical system, while a worthwhile investment in terms of enhancing productivity once it is set up, is costly. Nevertheless, it is imperative for the region to agree on the framework for such a system and then develop the tools for it, with the following considerations in mind:

- Each learner must be tracked within the system;
- The system must be updated on a regular basis;
- Information within the system must be linked;
- Multiple indicators of literacy in context must be developed to inform policy.

Summary of Discussions in Break-Out Sessions:

Literacy Interventions for Crisis, Post-Conflict and Emergency Situations

The workshop participants identified the following problems and issues that have challenged and constrained literacy work in areas under crisis or in post-conflict and emergency situations:

- Acute shortage of teachers¹⁶;
- Programmes are sometimes run by remote control¹⁷;
- Lack of a system-wide approach;
- Lack of financial transparency;
- Duplication of efforts and lack of coordination among NGOs; and
- Lack of community involvement and overdependence on external actors who make decisions for it.

Amidst these problems, however, the participants led by Her Highness Sheikha Al-Missned, argued passionately that keeping literacy programmes and schools going is a must. Apart from the children's entitlement to education, doing so is also a means of helping people cope with crisis. How to shield schools and literacy programmes from violence is identified by the group as a major challenge and an imperative facing the Arab world.

On the ground, the group stressed the need to put learner-friendly, community-based alternative programmes in place and promote

¹⁵ This requires an operationalization of the competencies learners are expected to acquire, the measurement tools or tests to establish a learner's competencies.

¹⁶ In addition, pre-18 year old teachers are neither trained nor competent to handle adolescents.
¹⁷ e.g. Iraq programmes run from Jordan

them actively even during a crisis¹⁸. In difficult circumstances, more creative strategies involving different actors at the community level could even be more effective than formal education because they would reflect the learner and literacy providers' assessment of what would be considered worth learning.

The Lebanon and Sudanese experiences are particularly instructive. With the Ministry of Education, young Lebanese volunteers, some of them trained in literacy work, helped support all types of education. Tapping into the energies of the local community and parents of out-of-school youth and children evacuated as a result of the recent war, the pool of teachers have helped them learn more about their country than they would have learned in school. In Sudan, SOLO reveals that people displaced from their villages nevertheless felt responsible for their communities. It is claimed that local NGO workers and volunteer teachers, have had good experience with creative strategies such as drama, dance, and poetry in pushing literacy and education; facilitating discussion of problems, issues and probable solutions; and helping communities link up with the international community.

The breakout group concluded with the following recommendations:

- Make a clear distinction among different types or stages of crisis (sudden, crisis, recovery) and spell out an array of approaches appropriate to the type of crisis as well as the security requirements¹⁹;
- Develop a mindset that is proactive rather than reactive;
- Advocate or negotiate with conflicting parties for maintaining schools as peace sanctuaries with UNESCO as playing a key role;
- Safeguard monitoring and evaluation, again with UNESCO playing an important role;
- Attend not only to the literacy and education needs of youth and adults but to the needs of the disabled especially women and children.

Benchmarking, Monitoring, and Evaluating Literacy

The bulk of the discussion in the break out group focused on the importance of M&E and the methodological issues and concerns associated with it. The premise of the group is that the collection and analysis of periodic and regular data is crucial in literacy monitoring and evaluation. The output of M&E, in turn, could guide literacy policies; give feedback to individuals/literacy workers for better programme implementation; and establish the programmes' track record for purposes of obtaining donor support.

Literacy Indicators and Measures

The development of quantitative and qualitative indicators of literacy and programme performance is imperative, according to

the breakout group. Some quantitative literacy measures exist. However, two issues were raised in the discussion were the validity of the measures and their reliability²⁰. The group also stressed the need to explore and develop qualitative indicators of functional literacy and of effective literacy programmes²¹. Beyond indicators, qualitative monitoring and evaluation methods may range from documentation of programme processes to self-assessments and objective assessment tests²².

Conditions for the Development of a Quantitative Database

Based on the experience of LAMP in Morocco, the development and maintenance of a regularly updated database on literacy at the country level, is premised on the following conditions:

- Capacity building at the national level, which may be costly at the start;
- Strong political support or the mobilization of resources to develop appropriate statistical mechanisms;
- Involvement of statistical bureaus, academics, and researchers, a partnership that guarantees scientific validity;
- Stakeholder involvement to enhance domestic capacities and minimize the risks of public criticism.

¹⁸ These programmes could range from developing distance learning modules for children in crisis situations that are brought to them (together with books) during curfew hours (as in the Gaza region), to the use of storytelling and mobile theaters as informal ways of learning what regular schools transmit in a more structured way (the Palestine experience); and the systematic use of local, indigenous and community-based knowledge for alternative learning.

¹⁹ Approaches that respect diversity of contexts and refrain from recommending one-size-fits-all types of solutions; turn crises into opportunities; value local knowledge and consequently, capitalize on communities, tapping into their inner resources rather than relying on external interventions.

²⁰ Literacy figures, for instance, may actually be underestimating the level of illiteracy since data gatherers do not usually reach marginalized areas.

²¹ For purposes of programme evaluation, these indicators might include attitude change, capacity for problem solving, and independence.

²² A participant argued for a rethinking of assessment tests that make adult learners feel that they are being treated like children.

Concluding Remarks

After a sharing of responses to the challenges identified in the Doha Conference by representatives of the participants, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education, Mr. Peter Smith expressed his gratitude to Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Missned, Chairperson of the Qatar Foundation and longtime friend of and advocate for UNESCO. He also thanked His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Emir of the State of Qatar for honouring the Conference with his presence. This, according to Mr. Smith, demonstrates the deep commitment of the State of Qatar to the cause of literacy and education.

The Conference shared numerous examples from throughout the region of successful programmes that bring literacy within the reach of individuals and communities. One programme may reach only a handful, or several hundred, or even several thousand people. But when the combined efforts of every single person in the Conference are considered, the cumulative achievement of literacy programmes is quite impressive. Nevertheless, the great strides in literacy in the Arab States Region in recent decades are not enough to turn the disturbing state of illiteracy in some countries around. A lot more work, requiring tremendous resources, has to be done. Mr. Smith exhorted the Conference participants to keep the momentum going. The Region, he said, cannot afford to drop the ball at this time, for the sake of future generations of Arab children.

In his closing remarks, Dr Abdulla Al-Thani, Vice-President - Education, Qatar Foundation, thanked delegates and organisers. He said the conference had highlighted the diverse types of illiteracy that now exist and the isolation they cause. It was no longer just a matter of not being able to read a newspaper. Nowadays, illiteracy means not being able to use the Internet, receive or send a text message, apply for a job, read a medical prescription, or participate in the democratic process. It is therefore at the very centre of sustainable human development – without these basic tools, individuals and societies cannot make progress.

Dr Al-Thani said Qatar Foundation and UNESCO share a long-term commitment to spreading the benefits of education to individuals and their societies, and the conference had proved to be a productive point of contact in the missions of the two organisations.

If this is our deep-rooted conviction, then it is our duty to protect education as the means by which we can prosper in this millennium. Hence it is our highest priority to protect education, particularly during times of war and crises. This requires a major shift in priorities, and forward thinking policies that consider not only short term security interests, but political insight that values human capacity and sustainable development. (Her Highness Speech).

Closing Media Statement by Dr Abdulla Bin Ali Al Thani, Vice President of Education, Qatar Foundation

This, the third Innovations in Education global conference, has proved an immense success.

The joint Qatar Foundation and UNESCO conference builds upon the momentum started back in 1996 with the establishment of the unique concept of Education City and continued thereafter with the launch of Innovations in Education.

International education experts from around the globe have gathered in Doha to share the latest thinking and experiences of eradicating illiteracy.

I have heard some exceptionally interesting ideas and methods to tackle the many forms of illiteracy.

Speakers have brought home the isolation that illiteracy creates.

Fifty years ago not being able to read a newspaper would have been isolating enough. Nowadays illiteracy means not being able to use the internet, receive or send a text message, apply for a job, read a medical prescription or participate in the democratic process. But it is a lot more than not being able to read and write.

The conference highlighted the diverse types of literacy, information technology and media, and how they can impact on different generations and sectors of society. As I mentioned in my opening remarks there is no room for complacency. Literacy will continue to challenge us. New forms of illiteracy will surface as we develop.

Indeed new challenges to education will continue to test us.

New crises and conflict will put new generations at risk of missing out on basic education. Existing conflicts will deprive whole communities opportunities to learn. New media will replace old. Funding will be stretched. Curriculums will not keep pace of changing contexts.

That is why innovation in education is so critical and why Qatar and the Qatar Foundation is resolute in its commitment to supporting and fostering innovation and creativity in the sector.

The only way to meet these challenges is to innovate, share ideas, share experiences, share what works and what doesn't.

As Sheikha Mozah said in her opening address, we need innovation and imagination to tackle these challenges.

For that reason Innovations in Education will continue its mission to support cutting-edge research and practice in education worldwide.

The Qatar Foundation, through Innovations in Education, is committed to meeting these challenges and ensuring Qatar, and Education City, is a global centre for educational innovation and best practice.



Dr. Abdulla bin Ali Al-Thani **Vice President of Education at Qatar Foundation**

Dr. Abdulla bin Ali Al-Thani is the Vice President of Education at Qatar Foundation.

Dr. Al-Thani holds a doctoral degree in Civil and Environmental Engineering from University of Southampton and masters from Colorado State University. While at the University of Southampton, Dr. Al-Thani worked closely with a research group that focus on sustainable management studies within the environmental sector, particularly landfills. The group was involved in numerical and mathematical modeling beside the laboratory models.

Dr. Al-Thani also served as a teaching assistant in the Civil Engineering Department at Qatar University throughout his graduate studies. In 2003, he became an assistant professor in Civil Engineering at Qatar University, teaching courses related to water resources and environmental engineering. He also represented his department on the College of Engineering's Industrial Relations Committee.

In 2004, Dr. Al-Thani was recruited by RAND-QPI to contribute to a number of research projects. While continuing to teach courses at the University, Dr. Al-Thani worked for RAND-QPI on Qatar University's reform initiative, assisting in establishing decentralized governance policies and procedures, modifying its practices with regard to stakeholder communication and faculty performance evaluation, and identifying leadership training and development activities for the University's academic and administrative leaders. During his time at RAND-QPI, Dr. Al-Thani also collaborated on an effort to develop recommendations for new initiatives aimed at fostering quality and innovation at the national level in Qatar.

Qatar Foundation, where Dr. Al-Thani became the Vice President of Education in 2005, is an organization that is committed to preparing students to take leadership roles in an increasingly global society. In addition to providing opportunities for research and community service, Qatar Foundation supports elite educational institutions in offering a complete range of academic programs, spanning from early childhood education to postgraduate studies. Five leading universities currently have branches in Qatar Foundation's Education City: Virginia Commonwealth University, Weill Cornell Medical College, Texas A&M University, Carnegie Mellon University, and Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service. Northwestern University is expected to begin their programs from the next academic year.

Summary Outcomes

UNESCO Regional Conferences in Support of Global Literacy and

Qatar Foundation Innovations in Education Series

'Literacy Challenges in the Arab States Region: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches'

The first UNESCO Regional Conference in support of Global Literacy and the third Qatar Foundation Innovations in Education Symposium, entitled '**Literacy Challenges in the Arab States Region: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches**', was jointly organized by UNESCO and the Qatar Foundation on **12 – 14 March 2007 in Doha, Qatar**, and took place under the auspices of Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al Missned.

The Conference, whose opening ceremony was honoured with the presence of the Emir of the State of Qatar, His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, was attended by five First Ladies – four from the region and one from Azerbaijan – and by seventeen ministers and two permanent secretaries, as well as UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors, policy-makers, UN agencies, representatives from civil society, universities and research institutes, programme managers and practitioners, multilateral and bilateral organizations, private foundations, donors, publishers, writers, and the media.

Sincere thanks were extended to the Qatar Foundation for taking a leading role by hosting this conference and for its hospitality. The support for literacy from such a key ally was recognized as important for deepening partnerships of this kind.

This Conference is part of a series of regional conferences being organized by UNESCO in the framework of United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) and UNESCO's Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE).

The Conference noted that progress in literacy in the Arab States Region is being made:

- Countries in the region are making strong efforts and solid achievements in improving literacy;
- NGOs are making important and rich contributions to improving literacy and to developing new approaches;
- A range of innovative experiences, effective practices and research evidence provide a sound basis for future action;
- Cooperation and networks of partnerships, demonstrated through this conference, should be further expanded and strengthened;
- Most importantly, the presence of ministers of education from the region demonstrated their dedication to literacy. They will review their national policies and strategies according to the outcomes of the conference, integrate them into national plans and increase investment in literacy;
- Of special significance is the fact that the First Ladies attending the conference, from within as well as outside the region, are committed to mobilise support and to rally for the cause of literacy in their own countries and beyond.

These elements of progress give a solid platform for strengthening action on literacy in the region, in order to address the particular challenge of adult literacy – we must not forget that approximately 60 million adults in the Arab States Region still do not have the literacy skills they need.

Recognising the particular challenges of the Arab States Region, the following approaches received broad support during the Conference:

- The three-pronged approach proposed by the 2006 EFA Global Monitoring Report will serve as the framework for action: ensuring access to quality primary education, scaling up effective programmes, and creating literate environments;
- A broader definition of literacy is essential, encompassing skills necessary for productive and active participation in society, beyond merely reading, writing and numeracy;
- Literacy should be promoted as a right for everyone, irrespective of age and gender;
- Special attention should be given to LIFE countries;
- Countries in conflict and post-conflict situations require special efforts and support from the region and by the international community;
- Literacy for women and girls needs particular emphasis, with specific programmes to address their needs;
- There are effective programmes in the region that must be further evaluated and taken to scale;
- Adult literacy is essential as part of wider development strategies and for achieving EFA and the Millennium Development Goals. This requires the collective responsibility of others ministries, such as social development, employment, health, agriculture, finance and economy;
- Partnership is essential in achieving adult literacy goals. Actors include government, civil society and the private sector. In the Arab States Region, the full engagement and recognition of NGOs will be crucial for promoting and delivering programmes;
- Good evidence supported by reliable and valid data is an essential basis for literacy policies and programmes. This implies a clear commitment to high-quality and sustained monitoring and evaluation, on the basis of recognised benchmarks;
- Investment in capacity development in all aspects of designing, delivering and managing adult literacy work is of prime importance in bridging the gap between policy and implementation;
- New and additional resources are necessary to implement adult literacy, from government budgets, regional and international donors, and private sector partners.

In support of these actions, the following specific measures were proposed during the course of the Conference:

- To call upon the Arab Summit, which will take place in Saudi Arabia in 2007, to put literacy high on its agenda and to support a regional programme for literacy;
- To propose the establishment of a regional fund to support effective programmes and new initiatives for literacy, both for governments and NGOs;
- To urge national governments of the region to undertake concrete follow-up to implement the recommendations of the conference;
- To ask UNESCO to set up a regional working group, bringing all actors together to support the follow-up of the conference.
- To call upon the international community to prioritize the protection of education in crisis and post-conflict situations in particular in Iraq. In this context, the UNESCO working group on crisis and post-conflict situations should focus particularly on designing modalities for the protection of teachers and students in Iraq.