

WRITING THE WRONGS
HIGH LEVEL WORKSHOP ON ADULT LITERACY
ABUJA – FEBRUARY 16TH 2007

CALL FOR ACTION

Officially 781 million adults are illiterate in the world, most of them women. In reality, this figure is much higher – and even more adults are unable to read or write well enough to function effectively in society. Yet literacy is a fundamental human right and a right that enables people to access and secure many other rights.

Committed to building new momentum on adult literacy, 60 participants from 24 countries gathered in Abuja, Nigeria from 12th-16th February 2007, including Ministers of Education, Permanent Secretaries, Directors and Managers of National Literacy Programmes, United Nations officials, donors and civil society organisations.

The participants were all committed to “writing the wrongs” in the field of adult literacy – reversing decades of under-investment in the sector, and transforming policy and practice to develop effective programmes. They identified a range of important priorities for national and international action.

NATIONAL ACTION

In order to make the case for renewed commitment and investment there is an urgent need for governments to take new action on adult literacy. ***We call on national, state and local governments as well as civil society actors to:***

1. **Understand the scale of the literacy challenge and ensure programmes recognise and respond to demand.** Present literacy statistics are unreliable and often significantly underestimate the scale of the problem. National adult literacy surveys are needed (along the lines of the recent survey in Kenya) to build comprehensive new evidence on the number and profile of people facing literacy challenges. Particular attention is needed to shift understandings from a dichotomous view of literacy that is based on people crossing some magic line from illiteracy to literacy (which does not exist). We must move to an understanding of literacy as a continuum.
2. **Collate national dossiers on the benefits of literacy.** There is considerable international evidence on political, social, economic, cultural and personal benefits that come from adult literacy. However, new research and new evaluations are urgently needed at a national level specifically on the multiple impacts of adult literacy, in order to convince Ministries of Finance and national policy makers.
3. **Renew national dialogue on literacy policies and practices by using the International Benchmarks** developed by the Global Campaign for Education and ActionAid International with support from UNESCO / the EFA Global Monitoring Report in 2006. These benchmarks

emerge from a detailed survey of 67 adult literacy programmes in 35 countries (see appendix 1). These benchmarks are a concise expression of accumulated international learning on developing an effective adult literacy strategy. They should be used to stimulate debate with all stakeholders but should be nationalised and contextualised in each country to reflect diverse contexts / realities.

4. Ensure that all stakeholders from all relevant sectors at local and national level engage in a new national debate on the pivotal role of adult literacy for achieving development goals. We call for the active involvement in this new debate of Ministries of Finance, Education and other line ministries, parliamentarians, civil society actors, national education coalitions and the media.

5. Include adult literacy in education sector plans, especially those submitted to the Fast Track Initiative (FTI). FTI donors will support the full Education For All sector if national governments put forward comprehensive plans. Pressures from in-country donors to reduce the focus of education plans to just primary or formal schooling must be resisted as there is a clear inter-dependency in the EFA goals.

6. Recognise adult literacy as the “invisible glue” presently missing from national plans seeking to address the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or Education For All (EFA) goals, as well as from Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and national development strategies– and take action to redress that. Any review of progress towards the MDGs or reviews of present PRSPs or National Development Plans should examine the impact of failing to address adult literacy.

7. Act on the understanding that effective adult literacy programmes require a significant increase in funding and sustained investment from core government budgets – but that the costs of illiteracy are much higher.

INTERNATIONAL ACTION

In order to mobilise new momentum on adult literacy and new investments by national governments, we need to work together to influence international actors. ***Particularly we call for:***

1. UNESCO to work more closely with national governments around adult literacy. They should specifically review and improve the way in which literacy data are conceptualised, collected, compiled and reported, moving beyond conventional dichotomous definitions.

2. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics to support national efforts to conduct national literacy surveys like that conducted in Kenya - to develop quality and reliable data on literacy at a reasonable cost.

3. The United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) and UNESCO’s Literacy for Empowerment initiative (LIFE) to consider the use of the international benchmarks on adult literacy for the purposes of planning and designing quality literacy programmes in the national context.

4. **The Fast Track Initiative to include the benchmarks for adult literacy in their indicative framework** – and to be explicit in guidelines to country-level donors that adult literacy is a legitimate and important area for inclusion in education sector plans.
5. **All bilateral and international donor meetings**, (for example those in Brussels in April 2007, in Dakar in December 2007 and the White House / UNLD regional Literacy Conferences) **to ensure that new resources are mobilised to support adult literacy** – recognising that at least \$1 billion of new aid per year is required urgently for closing the resource gap if the Dakar literacy goal is to be achieved by 2015.
6. **The World Bank, regional banks and donors to support national government's education sector plans especially those who are committed to investing in adult literacy** – demonstrating alignment to national plans, respecting their sovereignty and their right to determine their own education and development priorities.
7. **The IMF to remove conditionalities that unnecessarily constrain education budgets** so that countries have the fiscal space to invest in achieving the full MDG and EFA agenda. The achievement of development goals should be placed at the centre of macro-economic planning.
8. **Researchers and academic institutes to initiate and support new strategic research and new evaluations** on the impact of adult literacy on wider development goals.
9. **Civil Society Organisations to play a vigilant role** in facilitating synchronised action towards adult literacy goals.
10. **The Global Campaign for Education and all international NGOs to increase pressure** on achieving adult literacy goals, making this a core part of their agenda and action, including during the Global Action Week and on International Literacy Day.
11. **All relevant regional and international bodies to facilitate the sharing of practices on adult literacy**, promoting lessons learnt and the exchange of experiences between countries.

We commit ourselves to maintaining a new momentum for adult literacy nationally and internationally and welcome the offer from the State Minister of Education in Pakistan to host a follow up workshop later this year.

APPENDIX 1: THE BENCHMARKS

1. 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. The goals of literacy programmes should reflect this understanding.
2. Literacy should be seen as a continuous process that requires sustained learning and application. There are no magic lines to cross from illiteracy into literacy. All policies and programmes should be defined to encourage sustained participation and celebrate progressive achievement rather than focusing on one-off provision with a single end point.
3. Governments have the lead responsibility in meeting the right to adult literacy and in providing leadership, policy frameworks, an enabling environment and resources. They should:
 - ensure cooperation across all relevant ministries and linkages to all relevant development programmes,
 - work in systematic collaboration with experienced civil society organisations,
 - ensure linkages between all these agencies, especially at the local level, and
 - ensure relevance to the issues in learners' lives by promoting the decentralisation of budgets and of decision-making over curriculum, methods and materials.
4. It is important to invest in ongoing feedback and evaluation mechanisms, data systematization and strategic research. The focus of evaluations should be on the practical application of what has been learnt and the impact on active citizenship, improved health and livelihoods, and gender equality.
5. To retain facilitators it is important that they should be paid at least the equivalent of the minimum wage of a primary school teacher for all hours worked (including time for training, preparation and follow-up).
6. 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. Governments should put in place a framework for the professional development of the adult literacy sector, including for trainers / supervisors - with full opportunities for facilitators across the country to access this (eg through distance education).
7. 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), ensuring a minimum of one support visit per month. Programmes should have timetables that flexibly respond to the daily lives of learners but which provide for regular and sustained contact (eg twice a week for at least two years).

8. In multi-lingual contexts it is important at all stages that learners should be given an active choice about the language in which they learn. Active efforts should be made to encourage and sustain bilingual learning.
9. A wide range of participatory methods should be used in the learning process to ensure active engagement of learners and relevance to their lives. These same participatory methods and processes should be used at all levels of training of trainers and facilitators.
10. Governments should take responsibility to stimulate the market for production and distribution of a wide variety of materials suitable for new readers, for example working with publishers / newspaper producers. They should balance this with funding for local production of materials, especially by learners, facilitators and trainers.
11. A good quality literacy programme that respects all these benchmarks is likely to cost between US\$50 and US\$100 per learner per year for at least three years (two years initial learning + ensuring further learning opportunities are available for all)
12. Governments should dedicate at least 3% of their national education sector budgets to adult literacy programmes as conceived in these benchmarks. Where governments deliver on this international donors should fill any remaining resource gaps (e.g. through including adult literacy in the Fast Track Initiative)