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

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Living and learning for a viable future The power of adult learning

Annotated agenda

Making an effective global case for and commitment to adult learning and education

1. Adult education is a human right to be exercised by all. The case for adult learning and education corresponds to the case for lifelong learning: throughout the world, education is the indispensable foundation for creating and sustaining personal, social and economic well-being. Today, this is a lifelong and life-wide agenda both for empowerment and for the development of human resources. These two pillars bear equal weight; only together can they work effectively. Their combined impact can improve the quality of life for all citizens around the globe, generating and developing to the fullest extent the human capacities and dispositions needed to address old and new challenges – above all, those of poverty, hunger, inequality, intolerance, injustice and conflict.

2. Some countries emphasize adult learning and education for individual and social empowerment to combat poverty and inequality, nationally and internationally. Others underline sustainable human development to maintain social and economic well-being in the context of globalization and environmental concerns. Countries and world regions may have differently balanced priorities in adult learning and education, but they are united in seeking to improve the quality of life and in the recognition that there is a global dimension to all the challenges we face in the coming decades. Only with an informed, literate and active citizenry can we meet these challenges effectively – and this is only possible by bringing adult learning and education into the centre of policy and action, as a transversal agenda that cross-cuts policy domains and resource allocations. Ideally these should be integrated into a comprehensive lifelong learning system backed by an open and dynamic mechanism of recognition, validation and accreditation of all forms of learning, whenever, wherever and however it takes place, paying special attention to non-formal, informal and experiential learning. Adult education, as an inalienable human right, should be enshrined constitutionally by all countries.

Issues for discussion:

- (a) How do countries ensure the exercise of the right of adults to education?
- (b) How can countries work together to build a global case for adult learning and education? How can the rationales for empowerment and human resources development be reconciled constructively?
- (c) What must governments, civil society and enterprise do above all so that their commitment to adult learning and education in policy and practice is visible, concrete and effective?
- (d) What are the most promising political strategies to redefine and reposition adult learning and education within lifelong learning as a key transversal area for policy and action in each and every country?
- (e) What are the existing frameworks of recognition, validation and certification, how do they cater for non-formal, informal and experiential learning, and what contribution do they make to lifelong learning?

Anticipated outcomes:

- (a) greater refinement and understanding of policy options to address how citizens can exercise their right to education;
- (b) fuller appreciation of lifelong learning as an organizing principle for effective adult education;
- (c) better understanding of effective policy and practices for adult learning and education;

- (d) heightened interest in creating a momentum for an international initiative which will allow Member States to share practice and develop frameworks in the recognition, validation and accreditation of all forms of learning.

Developing effective governance for adult learning and education

3. The adult learning and education sector is fragmented in itself and stands at the margins – or straddles the borders – of established education and training policy terrains. At the same time, adult learning and education are strongly rooted in everyday life, local environments and realities, which naturally privilege decentralized and bottom-up processes of organisation and action. These features make adult learning and education potential exemplars for the development and application of good governance in its modern sense. This includes strengthening effective decentralisation through civil society, the private sector and community involvement and active participation at the grassroots level of policy and action. It also implies better channels of communication between bottom-up and top-down levels of evaluation and decision-making. However, effective governance and institutional structures for adult learning and education are incipient or lacking, even where integrated lifelong learning policies have been initiated.

4. Good governance means, above all, formats for policy action that generate and enlist trust among diverse stakeholders (including local government, business, workers' associations, NGOs and community organizations) to achieve common goals. Organigrams and procedures alone are unsatisfactory; the transfer of authority, resources and effective coordination should take place, and capacity-building is essential. Equally, the good governance agenda presents a tension that needs to be addressed. On the one hand, there are the virtues of establishing an identifiable and more powerful distinct policy terrain for adult learning and education within lifelong learning development, management and funding. On the other hand there is the evident need for improved structural coordination of an integrated adult learning and education policy and action agenda that draws its strength and resourcing from a variety of domains (such as agriculture, health, employment and environment). These may reinforce each other, but achieving positive resolution requires conscious strategy and planning.

Issues for discussion:

- (a) How can we overcome fragmentation while preserving the necessary diversity in adult learning and education? What strategies could neutralize the structural weaknesses associated with them? What can be done to strengthen the field's coherence and coordination? What examples of good practice in these respects can countries offer?
- (b) The potential offered by the greater involvement of civil society in adult learning and education policy and practice emerges as a strong theme in the *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* and the regional reports. What ways can countries suggest to promote this approach more systematically and insistently? What kinds of processes engender trust and participation in design, decision-making, resource allocation and coordination?
- (c) What kinds of governance structures and mechanisms would concretely promote higher priority, more resources and effective delivery for adult learning and education in the future? What examples do countries have of such arrangements?

Anticipated outcomes:

- (a) clearer identification of a range of strategies for integrated and inclusive governance, institution-building, strengthened coordination and effective management;
- (b) enhanced awareness of effective policies and factors conducive to good governance.

Investing in adult learning and education

5. All the available evidence shows that the proportion of GNP devoted to adult learning in education budgets is less than 1% in virtually all countries in the world, and that in some developing countries less than 0.1% of their education budgets goes to adult learning and education. This is reflected in poor rates of participation. In most developing countries, even participation in basic literacy is extremely low. The under-funding of the adult learning sector is a fact; the case for a significant infusion of extra resources is overwhelming.

6. The argument for broadening the base of funding does not obviate the responsibility of the state to allocate significant public funds to adult learning and education in line with the dual imperatives of empowerment and human resources development. Simultaneously, many more sources should be mobilised to complement public funding. Resource allocation should not be made solely on the basis of the crude arithmetic of derived benefits accruing to each individual stakeholder.

7. Effective ways of mobilizing more resources for adult learning and education are proposed in the *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*. Given governmental commitment and adequate public funding in the first place, these rest largely on incentives and co-financing mechanisms (including micro-credit), which should be designed with redistributive justice to the fore. Incentives and contributions may take financial and non-financial forms (such as time for learning). They should draw in all stakeholders, including community, non-governmental and civil society organizations, as well as business (with particular emphasis placed on small enterprises and the informal economy). Furthermore, development aid budgets should give greater priority to adult learning and education.

Issues for discussion:

- (a) CONFINTEA V recommended that public expenditure on education should be at least 6% of GNP, with an increased allocation to adult learning and education. What obstacles are there in meeting this recommendation, and how can adequate public funding for adult learning and education be ensured?
- (b) What examples of innovative and effective funding mechanisms and incentives for adult learning and education can countries share, and what can we learn from these?
- (c) How can Member States win the commitment of the corporate sector, civil society and citizens to invest more in adult learning and education?
- (d) How can the political commitment of the international donor community and development partners be translated into concrete funding outcomes, and what are the opportunities offered by more effective bilateral and multilateral North-South and South-South cooperation?

Anticipated outcomes:

- (a) deepened commitment of countries and the donor community to invest in adult learning and education, based on evidence and case studies of effective and innovative funding mechanisms;
- (b) considered appraisal of the applicability of the various financing and incentivizing options for investment in adult learning and education.

Promoting equity, inclusion and social cohesion

8. Educational equity is significantly correlated with economic equity and social inclusion. Participation in adult learning and education is a form of social engagement, which in turn generates social capital in civic, political and working life. This sustains social cohesion and supports the development of skills and competences for active participation in society.

9. The unequal distribution of access to and participation in adult learning and education is well evidenced in innumerable national and international reports and studies, as documented in the *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*. Women, in most countries, are at a disadvantage. People living in rural areas, older adults, migrants, indigenous populations, ethnic and linguistic minorities and people with disabilities are particularly likely to be under-represented. Prisoners are usually deprived of the right to education. Adults with low levels of education and qualification are least likely to participate in learning, irrespective of any other disadvantage. Multiple disadvantages operate cumulatively so that inequities in adult learning and education generate spirals of exclusion that reproduce social inequalities across the life-course and across generations.

10. Focused and targeted actions to combat inequities must, therefore, address their root structural causes. They should both prevent and redress the educational consequences of social disadvantage, and must take into account the features of people's everyday lives that constrain their participation in adult education (for example, the need to provide childcare or to replace lost income). Moreover, broad investment in shaping and enriching local environments provides the foundations for people to create new ways of life that can spawn diverse literate and learning cultures which integrate their identities, knowledge and traditions.

Issues for discussion:

- (a) What priority actions are needed to combat the social and economic risks of continued inequities in access to and participation in adult learning and education? What examples best illustrate the effectiveness of embedding the principles of equity, inclusion and social cohesion in adult learning and education policies?
- (b) How has the gender equity agenda in adult learning and education developed and changed since CONFINTEA V? What new challenges have emerged and how should these be tackled? What should be done to promote women's empowerment and equality in and through adult learning and education?
- (c) What policies, programmes and measures must be introduced to address the specific learning needs and demands of priority groups such as rural populations, older adults, migrants, indigenous populations, ethnic and linguistic minorities and people with disabilities? What examples are there of good practice in prison education?

Anticipated outcomes:

- (a) common understanding on how Member States can more effectively ensure participation in adult learning and education, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized groups;
- (b) renewed commitment for gender mainstreaming, and targeted and relevant programmes for women.

Ensuring literacy for all and enhancing competences

11. Literacy, as a human right, lies at the heart of basic education and constitutes the foundation for lifelong learning. Meeting the socially and technologically complex challenges of everyday life, particularly in a period of rapid global change, is closely bound up with knowledge, skills and

competences, and with learning. Literacy in general and adult literacy in particular is embedded in all these challenges, and constitutes a precious, supportive tool for their realization. Regardless of their stage of economic development, for contemporary societies human development is not an option – it is an obligatory investment in raising the quality of life. There is now a recognition that adult learning and education must occupy a central strategic position in sustainable human development. It is a recognition that places adult literacy in a new light as the essential basis upon which to empower people, expand their capacities, and ultimately, to build human resources development.

12. Adult learning and education take on a wider and a crucial role in these circumstances, given the rapidity of changing demands in working and social life and the need for corresponding adaptation and improvement of knowledge, skills and competences of the working population – the overwhelming majority of which is aged 15+ (and not simply 25+). The acknowledgement that there are different “dimensions and forms” of illiteracy – coupled with the emergence of mismatches between occupational demand and labour force supply, as well as a growing need for active citizenship in ever more complex surroundings – bring shared, if differently profiled, concerns for all countries.

13. These concerns prompt a redefinition and an expansion of the remit and the relevance of adult learning in general and adult literacy in particular for education and training systems and in patterns of provision. In view of the high illiteracy rate in some countries and a low skill level in most others, providing continuous opportunities for the development of literacy and key competences to every child, young person, woman and man is an ethical, democratic and development imperative.

Issues for discussion:

- (a) Adult literacy has not always been seen in close relation to human resources development, which is more likely to be anchored in employment rather than in educational policy and action. How do countries see the prospects of integrating literacy into these two domains, while retaining equal balance between social and economic rationales?
- (b) The past decade has seen growing recognition of diversified and complex literacies among adult learning and education policy-makers and practitioners in all parts of the world. These are relevant for people's and communities' empowerment and for human resources development at all education, qualification and occupational levels. What are the key challenges for adult learning in this respect? How do they bring the policy concerns and priorities of all countries closer together, facilitating more shared initiatives?
- (c) Sustaining and building on adult literacy has proven to be more difficult to achieve in many countries than was originally imagined. In view of the magnitude of the literacy challenge and the intolerably high levels of adult illiteracy worldwide, what can governments, civil society, the private sector and the international community do?

Anticipated outcomes:

- (a) shared conception of literacy not only as a right but also as a key competence which has a vital role in empowering people and, ultimately, in developing human resources;
- (b) strengthened sense of urgency and shared commitment among all stakeholders to redouble efforts and take specific measures to ensure sustainable and improved literacy levels for all;

- (c) increased determination of countries and the donor community to mobilize resources to assist Member States in their effort to implement relevant, high-quality programmes that will drastically reduce the high number of adults without literacy skills and competences.

Assuring quality and assessing learning outcomes

14. Relevance to adults' lives and the professional development of adult educators and trainers are the key coordinates for quality in adult learning and education. These must be contextualized within learning environments that are welcoming, well-equipped and accessible to a highly heterogeneous population of learners.

15. Relevant curricula for adults which ensure equity and inclusion are developed with their direct involvement. Such curricula are likely to take into account learners' life circumstances and their needs as they themselves identify them. Learning content and processes will have been devised so as to empower participants by raising their personal self-esteem and cultural pride; and to endow them with the competences required for living in a complex world. Learning outcomes will have been specified so that their applicability and usefulness in daily and working life are evident to the learners; empowering them to contribute to improving the quality of their lives.

16. Effective methods and instruments for assessing learning outcomes, including the validation of prior learning and which cover non-formal and informal learning, have not proliferated greatly. They are essential in the effort to open up access to progression routes, to document the quality of learning that has taken place and to evaluate the impact of that learning on people's lives.

17. Teachers and trainers constitute the single most important input for ensuring quality in adult learning and education. However, all too often adult educators are inappropriately or under-qualified: they need a specialized higher education qualification, based on course curricula that convey the essential dimensions of quality in process and outcome.

18. The drive for quality in adult learning and education also depends on supporting the development of a solid body of interdisciplinary research. This should be complemented by knowledge management systems for collection, analysis and dissemination of both qualitative and quantitative data and good practice which are openly accessible to practitioners, researchers and policy-makers, and which can enable the efficient deployment of resources.

Issues for discussion:

- (a) What are the most promising ways to develop quality criteria and standards in adult learning and education? Which indicators and benchmarks are most useful?
- (b) What is being done to improve the training, qualifications and professional status of adult educators and how are their impacts being appraised? How are higher education institutions involved in this process?
- (c) What are countries doing to collect and analyse data on adult learning and education to assure quality and inform policy?
- (d) How can learning outcomes be assessed and their results used to assure quality?

Anticipated outcomes:

- (a) ready endorsement of proven indicative quality standards and measures as possible options in Member States;

- (b) better awareness of exemplary policies and practices in professionalization of adult educators;
- (c) improved receptiveness to the introduction of national monitoring systems to assure quality and inform policy.