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UNITED NATIONS LITERACY DECADE: PROGRESS REPORT 2004-2005

SUMMARY

By resolution 56/116, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) for the period 2003-2012 as a contribution to the goal of Education for All and decided that UNESCO should play a coordinating role in stimulating and catalysing the activities undertaken at international level within the Decade's framework.

Pursuant to that resolution, UNESCO prepared a draft International Plan of Action for the Decade, which was submitted to the General Assembly at its 57th session. By resolution 57/166, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the Director-General of UNESCO, to prepare a report on its implementation for submission to the General Assembly at its 59th session. At this session, the United Nations General Assembly (resolution 59/149) requested UNESCO to reinforce its lead coordinating role for the Decade and make it complementary to other global initiatives; and requested the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the Director-General of UNESCO, to prepare and submit progress reports biennially on the implementation of the International Plan of Action to the General Assembly, beginning in 2006.

The Executive Board by 169 EX/Decision 3.4.3 invited the Director-General to work closely with UNLD partners, including United Nations organizations and bilateral/multilateral development agencies, to reinforce assistance to the Member States in need, to monitor the progress of the Decade and to submit a report to the General Assembly at its 59th session as well as to the Executive Board every two years, beginning in 2005.

In accordance with 169 EX/Decision 3.4.3, the Director-General submits this report to the Executive Board at its 172nd session. It describes progress made since May 2004 on the implementation of the UNLD International Plan of Action and how it contributes to the advancement of EFA goals. Particular attention is given to a critical understanding of UNESCO's coordination role to achieve the UNLD goals, as well as a description of programmes and projects undertaken around the world addressing the UNLD objectives.

Decision proposed: paragraph 28.

INTRODUCTION

1. Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that “Everyone has the right to education”, literacy remains a low priority for national governments and the international community. It is estimated that some 799 million adults are illiterate and 103 million children are out of school in the world. As stated in the Dakar Framework of Action, “... These figures represent an affront to human dignity and a denial of the right to education; they stand as major barriers to eliminating poverty and attaining sustainable development”. This is why literacy is central to the efforts at ensuring sustainable development, the achievement of the millennium development goals as well as all the other Education for All (EFA) goals.

2. To give effect to 169 EX/Decision 3.4.3, UNESCO undertakes its international coordination role for the United Nations Literacy Decade, monitors the progress of the Decade and submitted a first report to the United Nations General Assembly at its 59th session. UNESCO has worked with UNLD partners to reach the Decade’s goals and has reinforced its assistance to Member States to develop their literacy policy and practice strategies. In response to the requests made by the Executive Board and the United Nations General Assembly, this document provides an overview of progress made by showing activities undertaken around the world during the 2004 to mid-2005 period to implement the UNLD International Plan of Action and makes suggestions to further improve its effectiveness.

3. Certain themes (including literacy and gender; literacy and sustainable development; literacy and health; literacy and empowerment; literacy and peace) merit special attention during the Decade. They are linked to other international initiatives and goals, including the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), the Millennium Development Goals, and of course, all the EFA goals.

4. Concurrently, the Decade will be specifically implemented by UNESCO in a group of countries with the greatest development and education needs. The vehicle will be its strategic framework for human resource development using three major initiatives: the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), the Teacher Training Initiative in sub-Saharan Africa and the Global Initiative on Education and HIV/AIDS (EDUCAIDS).

UNESCO’s coordinating role (2004-2005) and UNLD advancement in the regions

5. In pursuance of its coordination role, UNESCO formed a UNLD International Team to provide advice. UNESCO also created Resource Person teams at regional level to contribute to the development of regional strategies and plans to implement the UNLD International Plan of Action. A Literacy Portal is being created for information-sharing worldwide. Finally, UNESCO has supported the momentum generated following the Decade’s launch by mobilizing stakeholders to participate in its implementation in all regions of the world.

6. UNESCO’s Goodwill Ambassador for the UNLD, the First Lady of the United States of America, Ms Laura Bush, has been promoting literacy worldwide during this period. Notably, she addressed a conference hosted by Georgetown University and UNESCO, “The United States, UNESCO and Education for All”, on 28 February 2005 regarding the importance of literacy for all, especially mothers and children reading together. She has spoken warmly about women’s literacy in Afghanistan and Jordan.

Regional activity reports

Africa region

7. With UNESCO's support, a number of African countries organized literacy-related events and programmes.

- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, International Literacy Day (ILD) was celebrated on 8 September 2004. The ceremony was held in Kinshasa with the participation of the UNESCO Director-General and the Ministry of Social Affairs in charge of literacy. School supplies were distributed to 28 Literacy Centres, which were rewarded for their efforts in promoting literacy competencies and skills.
- The Ethiopian National Commission for UNESCO, in cooperation with UNICEF, the Education Sector Donor Group and NGOs, held a national workshop on 8 September 2004 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to discuss policy, partnership and strategies for expanding literacy programmes.
- A national launch of the Decade was held in Enbonyi State, Nigeria, on 21 September 2004, focusing on advocacy for community education and literacy by radio.
- In Namibia (April 2005), the Namibian Coalition for UNLD (NCUNLD) announced the UNLD Strategic Plan for 2005-2006 to advocate, monitor and influence the implementation of a literacy for all policy framework.
- The Association of Donors of Education in Africa (ADEA) this year commissioned studies on literacy in a number of African countries for its next biennial meeting.
- UNESCO has cooperated with UNICEF on activities for children in formal and non-formal setting as well as targeting girls and women in Africa.
- In Burundi, UNESCO and UNICEF jointly implemented training activities for literacy trainers.
- UNICEF reported that the number of women and girls enrolled in functional literacy courses in Guinea-Bissau increased from 6,500 to 8,700 and that the dropout rate has declined significantly over the past two years.
- Through the UNESCO/Italy Funds-in-Trust Project on “Developing Non-Formal Education through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)”, literacy and NFE professionals working in disadvantaged regions in Namibia, Uganda, Mali and Burkina Faso were trained to utilize ICTs in literacy and lifelong learning activities.
- UNESCO and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) organized a regional workshop on “Capacity-Building of Literacy and Non-formal Education Facilitators” from 27 September to 1 October 2004 in Dakar, Senegal. The objectives were to identify good literacy practices in Africa and to develop a framework for an adaptable regional resource package for the training of literacy and non-formal education personnel. Further expert meetings have been held to develop a handbook intended for finalization in July 2005.

Arab States region

8. To promote literacy in the Arab region, UNESCO organized regional workshops on gender mainstreaming and capacity-building for female literacy personnel during the year.

- “Capacity-Building in Gender-Inclusive Scientific and Technological Literacy (STL) for Enhancing Life Skills” was the theme of the workshop held from 30 August to 2 September 2004 in Cairo. Its results as well as the outcomes of a national survey on the gender gap in participation in secondary and technical education have influenced the review of the national EFA plan in Egypt.
- UNESCO Cairo conducted a study in Egypt on the best practices in the use of ICTs to develop literacy competencies and skills.
- A *Literacy Mother Manual Training Kit* has been produced in cooperation with the Sudan Open Learning Organization, to promote lifelong learning through literacy and NFE for use by literacy practitioners throughout the region.
- The Syrian National Commission for UNESCO in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education will provide educational equipment and training sessions for life skills and literacy courses to the Bedouins in the rural area of Tadmor, Syrian Arab Republic, in their Rural Education Initiative for UNLD.
- UNESCO Ramallah assisted the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education to implement educational activities within their Education Development Plan for 2000-2005. Training workshops on adult education were to be held from June to July 2005 in the West Bank and Gaza.
- “Building capacity for civil society engagement in the EFA process: Integrating Literacy for All” was the theme of the 2004 Annual Meeting of the Collective Consultation of NGOs on EFA (CCNGO/EFA) held from 9 to 11 December 2004 in Beirut, Lebanon. The meeting brought together 120 international, regional and national NGOs and networks in education and literacy. A Plan of Action was developed to promote the participation of civil society organizations in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of literacy strategies.
- UNESCO took an active part in the G-8 BMENA Literacy Initiative Process (Broader Middle East and North African Countries) to develop guidelines for partnerships to enhance literacy levels in the region. These consultative processes included a series of technical meetings and workshops in Brussels (November 2004), Morocco (December 2004), London (February 2005), and Algeria (April 2005) to prepare for the Education Ministers Conference, which was the culminating event of this process, held in Jordan from 22 to 23 March 2005.
- Ministers of Education in the region endorsed the use of the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) being piloted by UNESCO/UIS, as a measurement tool to assess literacy levels in the region.
- A technical meeting to design and cost literacy programmes for implementation will take place in Egypt in September 2005. Considerable interest has been expressed by partners to assist with the reform process and to raise literacy levels in the Arab region. The United

Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) has been the lead coordinating agency, and is already conducting literacy activities in Egypt and Yemen.

Asia and the Pacific region

9. Advocacy on literacy took place across the Asia and the Pacific region.

- UNESCO, UNICEF, Oxfam Great Britain, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports organized “A National Literacy Conference” in September 2004 in Jakarta, Indonesia. As a follow-up, the President of Indonesia launched, on 2 December 2004, the “Literacy Movement” to promote literacy and to gain commitment from all stakeholders.
- UNESCO Almaty drew stakeholders’ attention to literacy problems through the involvement of the mass media in an advocacy campaign. Advocacy activities included the dissemination of a toolkit to provide information on UNLD, EFA and the MDGs, developed jointly with local NGOs in the subregion.
- UNESCO Bangkok provided support to the Ministries of Education of Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Thailand, Viet Nam, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia, to ensure that gender issues were integrated into EFA planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- UNESCO Phnom Penh assisted the Government of Cambodia in developing the “National NFE Action Plan”, the “Education Strategic Plan (ESP)” and the “Education Sector Support Programme (ESSP 2004-2008)”.
- UNESCO Beijing supported the Mongolian Government to combine traditional face-to-face literacy training with ICTs.
- UNESCO Jakarta assisted the Government of Indonesia in elaborating educational policies and practices to unify the curriculum to enable pupils to transfer from a Madrassah to the formal school system and vice versa.
- UNESCO Islamabad, in close collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), finalized the “Guidelines for the Strategic Framework of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade”. The Office also supported the National Centre for Non-Formal and Distance Education to develop teaching materials for adolescents and adults with literacy needs.
- With the support of UNESCO Hanoi, the Government of Viet Nam organized the National Five-Year Review of Community Learning Centres (CLCs) on 24 March 2005. As a follow-up, the National Assembly of Viet Nam approved on 18 May 2005 the “Revised National Education Law” which recognizes Community Learning Centres as official non-formal educational institutions in providing literacy and lifelong learning.
- UNDP is providing support to the Afghan Government through literacy activities. The Literacy Department developed a National Plan to improve the literacy rate from 28% to 60% and established 87 functional schools in Kabul and 122 in the provinces.
- UNESCO, through the Japanese funds-in-trust, in cooperation with UNDP and the Afghan Government, is carrying out a project on Literacy and Non-formal Education Development in Afghanistan (LAND Afghan) to prepare a technical and structural base for promoting

literacy and NFE with emphasis on girls and women along with learning materials development, NFE personnel training and the creation of CLCs.

- Within the framework of UNESCO's cross-cutting theme related to poverty eradication, an interdisciplinary project entitled "Meeting the learning needs of out-of-school adolescents, particularly adolescent girls, in South Asia" is under way. It responds to the learning needs of out-of-school adolescents by integrating literacy, life skills, science and legal education with access to microfinance for enhancing income-generating opportunities. Pilot projects are being carried out in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal for over 6,000 adolescents in depressed rural areas.

Latin America and the Caribbean region

10. Latin America and the Caribbean region also had an active year.

- The Cuban Ministry of Education, with the participation of UNESCO and other international education organizations, held "The First World Congress on Literacy" from 31 January to 4 February 2005 in Havana. Cuban national experience and their ongoing support for literacy programmes in Latin American and African countries were discussed along with the current literacy situation worldwide.
- UNESCO Montevideo, together with OMEP (World Organization for Early Childhood Education), launched the "Open call 2004 to innovative literacy endeavours", an initiative to support innovative projects on literacy and health care in Uruguay.
- A group of literacy experts met in June 2004 at UNESCO Santiago to elaborate the UNLD Regional Plan of Action, which was presented during the year at various regional and international conferences.
- UNESCO Brasilia continued to provide support to the Brazilian Ministry of Education to establish a national policy for literacy and adult education. A qualitative evaluation of two major programmes was concluded in March 2005. The Ministry of Education is already using the results. UNESCO Brasilia initiated, in May 2005, the implementation of an experimental adult literacy project financed by Japanese funds-in-trust. The Brazilian experience is being shared with Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa. A cooperation agreement was established in May 2005, with the UNESCO Cluster Office in Namibia and the Angolan Ministry of Education, to implement the Italian funds-in-trust project to develop a "National Strategic Plan on Literacy in Angola".
- UNESCO San José is providing support to the Ministry of Education of Panama for a programme to address illiteracy and poverty in indigenous areas. UNESCO assisted the Cuban Government in documenting the Cuban experience on literacy and ICT for rural women. This case study will be presented at the World Summit on the Information Society (Tunis, November 2005), and at the EFA High-Level Group Meeting (Beijing, November 2005).

Europe region

11. There were also activities across Europe and North America.

- The UNESCO Institute of Education (UIE), in close collaboration with the UNESCO French National Commission for UNESCO, the Agence Nationale de Lutte Contre

L'Illettrisme (ANLCI), the European Association for the Education of Adults (AEAE) and the European Union (EU), organized the "European Regional Meeting on Literacy" held from 2 to 5 April 2005 in Lyon, France. Participants included policy-makers, representatives of research institutes and universities as well as public and private literacy providers. It was agreed that UIE should coordinate the United Nations Literacy Decade in Europe and be a clearing house for best practices in the European region. Most countries of Europe and North America have long recognized inadequate literacy competencies and skills among their citizens as well as immigrant populations, but there is a renewed commitment to improve the relevance and quality of school-based literacy learning, adult continuing education and other forms of adult literacy provision grounded in national or state legislation, evidence-based policy and institutional arrangements.

United Nations agencies' contributions towards UNLD objectives

12. Both the sixth meeting of the Working Group on EFA to be held at UNESCO, Paris, from 19 to 21 July 2005, and the fifth meeting of the High-Level Group on EFA to be held in Beijing, China, from 28 to 30 November 2005, will focus on, among other issues, literacy and education for rural people. The High-Level Group meeting will be informed by the EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) 2006 due to be published in early November. The central theme of the 2006 GMR issue will be literacy.

13. UNESCO has started work on the "Literacy Initiative for Empowerment" (LIFE), which is a programme of action targeting countries with adult literacy rates of less than 50% or with 10 million or more adult illiterates. It is intended to substantially increase quality literacy learning opportunities within the UNLD framework. A LIFE Partnership meeting was held from 21 to 22 July 2005 at UNESCO in Paris to discuss how to strengthen partnerships for effective literacy provision.

14. UNESCO continued its efforts to promote literate environments. A second Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the biennium 2005-2007 between UNESCO and the International Reading Association (IRA) is in place, to continue the implementation of UNESCO's programme "Reading for All", begun in July 2003. This programme assists countries with formal and non-formal primary and secondary education and fosters the twinning of universities around the world to improve the teaching of reading and writing.

15. The World Food Programme adopted a strategic plan for 2004-2007. One of its strategic priorities in education is to reduce gender disparity in access to education and skills training. In 2004, WFP provided school feeding for 16.6 million children in 69 countries. WFP is preparing a policy paper to guide and expand its support to literacy, skills training and non-formal education.

16. UNICEF provided broad-based support to literacy at country level in 2004. About two thirds of their programmes targeted girls and women, while one third focused on children in formal and non-formal settings. Most programmes included technical assistance, capacity development and provision of learning materials.

17. ILO is carrying out an action programme for the 2004-2005 biennium to improve access to and quality of education by helping to reduce the shortage of qualified teachers. This programme is now operational in 12 African, Latin American, Caribbean and Eastern European countries. It aims to assist ministries of education, teachers' unions and private school management to engage in a social dialogue process in order to propose national policy solutions for shortages of qualified teachers.

18. UNFPA continued its efforts to ensure that basic education and literacy, especially of women and girls, are an integral component of all programmes. Major literacy projects have been implemented in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

19. Through the project “Reducing Vulnerability to Achieve Sustainable Livelihoods”, UNESCO, in collaboration with UNAIDS and other agencies in South Africa, Asia (India) and Latin America, is working with marginalized and vulnerable populations to improve their livelihood skills through basic education and business skills training, including organic farming.

20. UNESCO awards three literacy prizes annually: the International Reading Association Literacy Prize and two King Sejong Literacy Prizes. The theme of the 2004 International Literacy Prize was “Gender Equality”. The “International Reading Association Literacy Award” went to Working People’s Education in Mauritius; the two “King Sejong Literacy Prizes” went to AlfaSol in Brazil and the Steering Group of Literacy Education in Qinghai Province, China. In 2005 the theme was “Literacy for Sustainable Development”. The International Reading Association Prize was awarded to the Association PROGRESSO from Mozambique, and the King Sejong Prizes went to GOAL, an NGO from Sudan, and the Association AULA in Spain. The Government of China recently announced that it would sponsor a UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy within the framework of LIFE.

Towards better monitoring and evaluation of the Decade

21. A major issue faced by the global community is the lack of reliable and comparable cross-national data on the state of literacy. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) works to improve its data collection procedures and engages in statistical data collection and analysis for capacity-building in developing countries. In 2003, UIS, in cooperation with UNESCO Headquarters, UIE and the World Bank, launched the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) to develop direct measurement of a range of literacy skills. A National Planning Report template was provided to countries to plan for and cost the requisite LAMP activities.

22. In 2004, UNESCO expanded the implementation of the Non-Formal Education Management Information System Programme (NFE/MIS) which was developed in the framework of the NFE Monitoring and Evaluation Programme to guide policies and planning, and to improve the management, coordination and delivery of NFE at the national and sub-national levels. The programme was first tested in the United Republic of Tanzania, Cambodia and India, then extended in 2004 to Costa Rica. In 2005, Morocco, Jordan and Niger expressed their interest in participation.

23. The UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE) is supporting a new project in Namibia to reinforce national capacity to evaluate NFE and literacy programmes for young people and adults. UNESCO Windhoek continued to support the strengthening of monitoring and evaluation methodologies for literacy and NFE. Core indicators for literacy and NFE monitoring were identified.

24. Literacy is the theme of the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006*. This focus on literacy will contribute to reinforcing its centrality to all learning and to all the EFA goals. It will also address the complexity of literacy issues for policy and practice to a wide audience of public and private decision-makers. UNESCO contributes to the Report in general by: hosting its editorial team; providing logistical support; designating one staff member as administrative manager; convening and participating in the Editorial Board; and, this biennium, with a financial contribution. The independent GMR editorial team consults UNESCO staff at Headquarters and in field offices along with their wider network of education specialists and did so for the literacy issue through an online consultation; through commissioning specialist background papers from staff; and through UIE,

IBE and IIEP. The GMR works closely with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics for all data collection and compilations that appear in the Report.

The challenges

25. The UNLD, like other United Nations International Years and Decades, is intended to provide a framework in which to mobilize and focus attention on the major issues facing the international community as well as to ensure concrete action. After the initial launch at United Nations Headquarters and in countries, it is evident that there is a strong need for a clearer sense of direction and purpose with a sustained programme of intervention as is vital to a decade-long effort. It appears that most of the ongoing activities, programmes and projects are time-bound and limited in scope, resources and potential impact on quality educational services for sustainable development and social transformation.

26. Furthermore, well-designed, good quality programmes obviously require committed political will, long-term financial resources and effective institutional infrastructure. Although donors have responded to calls for the financial support of primary and girls' education, funding for adult literacy, out-of-school children and youth with inadequate literacy competencies and skills has not received priority attention. UNESCO's coordinating role for the UNLD needs to address issues of quality literacy provision, based on adequate resources, sustainable programmes, and the integration of literacy concerns in sector-wide and overall national development planning in all forums. However, to do so will require a more positive response and well-articulated and mutually reinforcing cooperation with other United Nations agencies and development partners.

27. In order for UNESCO to fulfil its mandate with respect to the ambitious goals of the United Nations Literacy Decade, it requires a sustained commitment in terms of human and financial resources. UNESCO has had some 50 years' experience in bringing literacy for all age groups onto the international agenda. It needs to better harness that experience and the lessons learned to give the UNLD the foundation, infrastructure and flexibility to provide the sustained and quality services expected by UNESCO Member States. It will require its own sustained commitment even more so in the face of alternative and frequently urgent items on the international agenda so as to ensure that UNESCO addresses literacy in a relevant and sustainable manner for the twenty-first century. To this end, maximum benefit needs to be obtained from the forthcoming meeting of the EFA High-Level Group in Beijing and from the 2006 Global Monitoring Report on EFA.

Proposed draft decision

28. In the light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling 169 EX/Decision 3.4.3, whereby the Director-General was invited to work closely with UNLD partners to ensure the attainment of literacy, to monitor on a continuous basis the progress of the Decade, to submit a report to the General Assembly as well as to the Executive Board every two years and to reinforce assistance to Member States in need,
2. Having examined document 172 EX/10 on the progress of the United Nations Literacy Decade,
3. Requests the Director-General to strengthen the Organization-wide commitment to literacy for all age groups and ensure concerted, sustainable action with its field offices

and specialized institutes as well as UNESCO partners to successfully achieve the UNLD goals;

4. Invites the Director-General to continuously monitor the progress of the Decade in cooperation with UNLD partners at regional and international levels and prepare and submit a report on that progress to the United Nations General Assembly at its 61st session as well as to the Executive Board at its 177th session in autumn 2007.