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**STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS AND FEASIBILITY OF THE
LITERACY TRAINING METHOD *YO SÍ PUEDO***

SUMMARY

Pursuant to 174 EX/Decision 44, this synthesis report presents a summary of the findings as well as the outcome and recommendations of the study on the effectiveness and feasibility of the literacy training method *Yo sí puedo*.

Decision proposed: paragraph 39.

BACKGROUND

1. The Executive Board, by 174 EX/Decision 44, requested the Director-General to “expedite the decision taken at its 171st session and to submit to it, at its 175th session at the latest the conclusions of the studies on the feasibility and effectiveness of the Cuban literacy training method *Yo sí puedo* and on the possible involvement of UNESCO in initiatives enabling advantage to be taken of the method for the sake of progress towards achieving the objectives of the United Nations Literacy Decade and of the Millennium Development Goals in the field in question”.

2. The *Yo sí puedo* (YSP) method is being applied and expanded in 12 countries in Latin America, principally through the initiatives of local authorities. The study sought to assess the effectiveness and feasibility of the method in three countries: Mexico, Ecuador and Paraguay. To this end, UNESCO commissioned case studies to be carried out by the Peruvian NGO TAREA for Ecuador and Paraguay and the Mexican Institute of Adult Education (INEA) for Mexico. Further support was provided by the NGO CENAISE in Ecuador, by the *Dirección General de Educación Permanente* (DIGEP) of the Ministry of Education in Paraguay, and the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo in Mexico.

3. In view of the constraints posed by time and conditions, a purposive sampling method was adopted to carry out the study in specific regions of the three countries. Data and information collection was carried out through observations, focus group interviews, consultations with NGOs and national authorities, test applications and review of materials.

4. Among the documents and materials reviewed were the case studies of Venezuela and Mozambique carried out by UNESCO (2005), an assessment conducted in Michoacán, Mexico, by INEA (2006), and an assessment by the *Dirección de Educación de Personas Jóvenes y Adultas* of the Ministry of Education in the Dominican Republic (2005). Also reviewed were the impact studies carried out in Michoacán (2005) and Oaxaca (2006), Mexico, and in Ecuador (2006) by the Cuba-based *Instituto Pedagógico Latinoamericano y Caribeño* (IPLAC) as well as IPLAC documents on the method.

5. Finally, the study was guided by the following general principles regarding literacy and extraneous factors:

- Literacy training schemes – and above all literacy “campaigns” – are seen as having dimensions that go beyond education to include social and political aspects. These training schemes and campaigns are usually dependent on the active participation of particular stakeholders and priority is given to alliances, direct resources, etc.
- The historical relationship between Cuba and the countries in Latin America has an important role in the collaborative bilateral relations in education, health, culture and related areas. Cuban bilateral cooperation and solidarity are key factors in countries that opt for YSP.
- The region has a wealth of literacy training programmes and methods with accumulated knowledge, trained personnel, studies and networks. Nevertheless, fragmentation persists. The YSP method exists and functions within this scenario.
- The need for literacy training as a human and social development priority is a widely recognized issue in the region and can also be found in the commitments of presidents, ministers and international organizations. In that sense, YSP is one of Latin America’s responses to this need.

GENERAL FRAMEWORK OF THE *YO SÍ PUEDO* METHOD

6. The *Yo sí puedo* literacy training method was developed by the *Instituto Pedagógico Latinoamericano y Caribeño* (IPLAC) in the year 2000 and was tested for the first time in Haiti through the use of radio. Video was later introduced as well.

7. The programme is based on the use of 17 videos pre-recorded in Cuba that contain 65 lessons. Included in the package are workbooks for each participant and a facilitator manual. The lessons are presented in three blocks: preparation, learning to read and write, and consolidation. It is expected that a person will learn to read and write in seven weeks, with daily classes of approximately two hours' duration, from Monday through Friday. In order to be considered literate, a person must be able to write a legible letter in a defined format at the end of the course.

8. The method is based on the association of each letter of the alphabet with a number. The sequence of letters (associated with a number) is according to the frequency of use. This presumes the presentation of sets of letters (associated with the respective numbers) forming a word and graph that facilitates memorization.

9. Facilitator manuals contain information on the methodology. Facilitators are responsible for general organization and for motivating student participation. The teaching process is based principally on videotaped material. A second, expanded (post-literacy) phase has been designed that includes 600 video classes for 20 months and is the equivalent of an accelerated primary (six grades) school course.

10. With the exception of Venezuela, only the first phase of the YSP method is being used and arithmetic is excluded from the programme, although Mexico and Paraguay have introduced elements of arithmetic in order to make it possible for YSP-trained individuals to access other formal programmes.

COUNTRY CONTEXTS

Mexico

11. The study was conducted in the States of Michoacán and Oaxaca, both with high rates of poverty and below-average education indicators. Educational services have improved in recent years thanks to programmes specifically conceived for the rural areas (Conafe, PRODEI, bilingual education). Nevertheless, the provision of educational services continues to be insufficient.

12. According to INEGI, the illiteracy rate for women is 13.9 % in Michoacán (2003) and 22.3 % in Oaxaca (2004). In the rural areas, 21 out of every 100 women do not know how to read and write. Both states are culturally diverse with dispersed populations, high internal migration, and emigration to the United States.

13. The Cuban programme “Alfa TV” or YSP was introduced to Mexico within the framework of bilateral agreements. In the case of Michoacán, a cooperative programme in basic education was initiated in 2003, which included teacher training, literacy training and early childhood education. In Oaxaca, the state government established an agreement with the Ministry of Education of Cuba in March 2005 for assistance in literacy training. The main difference between the two cases lies in the institutional set-up. In Michoacán, YSP coordination was established in parallel to other existing programmes while in Oaxaca, the Cuban consultants were linked to a state entity, namely, the *Instituto Estatal para la Educación de Adultos del Estado* supported by the *Instituto Estatal de Educación*.

14. However, the procedure for operationalizing YSP and the materials used in both cases are similar: agreements with authorities at different levels; identification of illiterate adults; defining the roles of the Cuban consultants, coordinators and facilitators; training of coordinators, who in turn train the facilitators. This is followed by the delivery of materials, the development of classes and, at the end, the awarding of diplomas.

Ecuador

15. According to the year 2000 census, 9% of the adult population is illiterate while 21.3% is functionally illiterate. Among the 9%, 24.5% are rural dwellers, 28% indigenous, and 10.5% of African descent. The study was carried out in Cotacachi, Pichincha, Cayambe, Lote and Tabacundo where there is a high number of rural indigenous women and a considerable number of children under 15 years of age who are without access to the formal education system.

16. Since February 2006, the *Dirección Nacional de Educación Popular Permanente* (DINEPP) has been implementing the National Literacy Training Adult Education Plan, which is part of the Ten-Year National Education Plan, in collaboration with the *Dirección Nacional de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe* (DINEIB) and the *Corporación para el Desarrollo Afroecuatoriano* (CODAE); and with the participation of the *Consejo Nacional de las Mujeres* (CONAMU), *Red de Buen Gobierno*, and IPLAC.

17. The agreement for the YSP programme was signed in March 2004 between the Embassy of Cuba and the municipal government of Cotacachi. In August 2004, the first group “graduated” from the programme and, in April 2005, Cotacachi was declared the “first territory free of illiteracy”. According to the local government, the illiteracy rate had dropped from 11.9% to 3.9%. A total of 1,667 participants, 68.4% of whom were women and 31.6% men, had benefited from the programme.

18. As of June 2006, according to IPLAC, beneficiaries total 20,475, with 16,225 graduates and 4,000 enrolled. The head office of DINEPP states that between 2004 and 2006, 16,769 people attended classes, at a cost of US \$45 per student. At present, 16 of the 22 provincial governments are promoting the YSP method.

19. For 2006, the Literacy Training for Development Project of the Andrés Bello Agreement has allocated US \$150,000 for the Tri-national Frontier Project between Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Priority will be placed on the indigenous areas of the three countries.

Paraguay

20. Paraguay is an ethnically and linguistically diverse country with 17 ethnic groups and two official languages, Spanish and Guaraní. The rural population speaks mainly Guaraní and most of the urban population is bilingual. According to the 2002 census, the number of illiterates was 230,803 and there were 893,457 functional illiterates.

21. The country has a National Literacy Training Plan with three different programmes: PRODEPA (young people and adults), Bi-Alfa (intercultural bilingual: Spanish and Guaraní) and the YSP televised classes. The study was conducted in the Central and Amambay Departments.

22. The YSP method was introduced to Paraguay as a gift from the President of Cuba to the writer, Roa Bastos. In 2003, DIGEP carried out an assessment of the method and recommended that it be implemented with some modifications. The method was initiated in the Central, Cordillera, Amambay, Caazapá, Concepción, and Alto Paraná Departments. In the same year, the Young

People and Adult Education Reform was launched with the aim of combining all programmes to achieve “a country free of illiteracy”.

23. By 2005, 2,730 people had completed the method in the two departments where this study took place. With the inclusion of those living in Caazapá and Concepción, the total reached 5,120. A high number of the YSP graduates had entered other adult education programmes. The possibility of providing continuity to YSP with another programme called *Yo sí puedo seguir* (“Yes, I can continue”) has not yet come to fruition. In Paraguay, YSP does not have direct support from Cuban advisers. Management is national while the equipment (television and VHS) and the main teaching materials are provided by Cuba. DIGEP carries out periodic assessments.

24. The initial goal of 6,000 participants grew to 45,000 thanks to the participation of *Cable Canal* and the *Nación-Diario Crónica* group which published notebooks for the Paraguayan technical team. The absence of facilitators has been compensated in part by in-family assistance.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Effectiveness

25. The study finds that the YSP method is in fact more than a method. It would be more appropriate to understand it as a literacy training model that goes beyond processes, materials, strategies, etc., as it includes, both explicitly and implicitly, concepts of literacy training, learning, life skills and social mobilization, and involves a wide range of actors with varied roles from the beneficiaries of the literacy training to other stakeholders such as state entities and other concerned institutions.

26. The YSP method has clearly contributed to repositioning literacy training as a priority on the public agenda of the countries subject to this study – particularly in regard to functional literacy and to out-of-school youth. It involves social mobilization on a theme that was neglected when massive “campaigns” were abandoned in favour of other modalities. However, the model does not make a conceptual distinction between the complex categories of illiteracy or functional illiteracy, nor does it take into consideration, for example, the five levels of literacy that are used by the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP).

27. The applied model differs little from other experiences in Latin America in its historical beginnings. Conceived as a political campaign and an opportunity for the social mobilization of various actors (at the local level) to facilitate basic knowledge of reading and writing for underprivileged populations, the conceptualization and systematization of the model have neither been researched in depth nor widely disseminated. Hence, questions remain regarding its theoretical and methodological approach, assessment processes, definition and categories of literacy, distinguishing traits of adult learning, as well as linguistic and sociocultural adaptation.

28. YSP has shown little sign of incorporating changes in the learning processes and has not taken advantage of the latest development in the field of literacy such as the expanded vision of lifelong learning, definitions and levels of literacy as well as the “updated” meaning of literacy skills. It takes a rather traditional view of language learning and does not seem to explore opportunities to create linkages between language, communication and culture. Some efforts have been made to adapt the programme through the inclusion of culturally appropriate elements, and through translations into other languages – even into Braille. Nevertheless, several of the stakeholders who were interviewed noted that, given the complexity of literacy-related issues, YSP

lacks the holistic view and approach required to effectively address the diversity in forms of communication, types of languages and varying needs of learners in different sociocultural contexts.

29. With few exceptions, it gives little attention to numeracy or critical thinking and rarely takes into account prior learning (as in the case of school drop-outs) or knowledge (as in the case of traditional knowledge or skills). It gives priority to learning processes that are somewhat mechanical and viewed as instrumental.

30. The role of facilitators has received both recognition and criticism. Praise is given to their strong social commitment and interest, management of materials and sense of discipline. But problems have been noted in the differences in pedagogical approach, facilitating of communication, “teaching” abilities, innovativeness, and capacity to work with diversity. Here, there is a clear association between the “campaign” model and the profile of a “facilitator” rather than that of a teacher. A systematic proposal for lifelong learning and adult literacy will need to define a new teacher profile.

31. While all these considerations do not invalidate the achievements of YSP, it must be mentioned nevertheless that they do colour the assessment of its effectiveness.

Feasibility

32. The institutional framework within which YSP operates reveals notable differences in each of the case studies. However, it can generally be said that YSP is based on alliances between the central and local governments. In most cases, however, its lack of nationwide impact can be attributed to two main reasons: problems related to the complex negotiation process; and a lack of coordination with other existing literacy programmes. In some instances, local leaders see in the YSP model an opportunity to make a short-term impact and do not always take into account the implications and conditions for management, replicability and sustainability.

33. YSP is considered to be low-cost in general, although the exact cost is difficult to estimate. Cuban authorities calculate the cost to be between \$23 and \$33 per student while others (as in the case of Ecuador) have made reference to \$45 and above. Adding to the complication of coming up with an accurate estimate are non-monetary factors such as the solidarity contributions of Cuba as well as the local investment in terms of logistics, bonuses, mobilization, reproduction of material, food, communications, publicity, transportation, complementary materials, etc.

34. A relatively low cost in addition to the local logistical support would create favourable conditions for an expansion and replication of the programme, keeping in mind the need for appropriate adaptations. The YSP method does have an administrative comparative advantage in that it functions in an organized, uniform, disciplined and systematic manner.

35. The assessment reveals important lacunae in the YSP programme. In general, it presents technical and political complications that hinder proper external evaluations. Specifically, it lacks systematic assessment processes and exhibits weaknesses in the use of information. Its student learning achievement assessment has limitations, and there is no agreement on achievement levels, certification, promotion, and links with formal education systems. Nor does it take into consideration support in this field from other existing practices and models. In recent years, IPLAC has created a social impact assessment model that needs to be validated and enriched. Some of its self-assessments show a very modest level of self-criticism, a trait that seriously limits the possibilities of improving any system.

36. In general, the degree of satisfaction of the participants is high – particularly that of women due to the special recognition they receive in the programme. The value attributed to the method goes beyond functional learning. This is also the case for facilitators. Participants' suggestions for improvement include learning in their mother language, improving contextual adaptation, increasing the number of texts, lengthening the duration of the course, expanding the scope of vocabulary, including arithmetic, and linking it with formal education systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

37. The recommendations aim to improve the pedagogical results and social impact of the YSP method by building on strengths and addressing challenges.

(i) Designing plans for post-literacy

From the outset, a comprehensive and articulated plan for post-literacy programmes should be designed along with the possibility of inserting them into structures and levels of the formal education system. This would have important implications for national plans and agreements, allocation of resources, national capacity development, policy and technical advice and follow-up, definition of the roles of the many stakeholders, centre-local relations, and adaptations.

(ii) Improving coordination

Coordination with the relevant levels and departments of national educational entities and systems as well as with other programmes is a political, managerial and methodological imperative. Equally important would be to support the elaboration of a consistent and recognized national policy and of an inclusive and coordinated central and local plan. These would contribute to eliminating fragmentation and competition; encourage the inclusion of the theme of literacy on the national agenda; overcome “ad hoc” campaigns while encouraging social mobilization; help to understand literacy and its different levels and facets; and strengthen policies of student retention and the completion of studies.

(iii) Reviewing the conceptual model

The further development and dissemination of a conceptual model of YSP are of key importance, as are its relations and synergies with other methods. It should also develop an assessment methodology based on clear indicators and benchmarks. This would allow the results to be utilized with more rigour, facilitate post-literacy follow-up of the beneficiaries, and provide evidence-based conditions for certification, promotion, and links with formal systems. It would also provide quality inputs for systematic improvement. It is vitally important to review the working definition of literacy and the criteria of a literate person in order to bring them up-to-date and in line with current trends and needs.

(iv) Contextual adaptations

Experiences, no matter how successful they have proven to be in one context, cannot be transplanted without prior research, adaptation and social agreement. YSP should be more open to adapting its programme according to the needs of the varying contexts and to following a more holistic approach in dealing with cultural, social and linguistic diversity.

(v) Developing the capacities of facilitators and coordinators

The processes of selection, training and performance assessment of facilitators and coordinators should be improved. The voluntary character of the method is a strength of YSP but it must be accompanied by better preparation and support. Training and preparation should place more emphasis on the definition and the methodologies of adult learning, learning scenarios and experiences, relations with the needs of daily life, and the use of prior learning.

(vi) Enhancing documentation and information systems

Documentation and information systems could be strengthened by compiling disaggregated statistics on students by gender, age, culture, location, prior knowledge, levels of self-assessment and continuation of studies. Budgetary and financial systems should be improved to be more precise and rigorous. These systems should promote transparency of information on the method, which the study found to be lacking.

(vii) Promoting national/local ownership

Capacities to promote national ownership of the method, to assist its adaptation by local actors, and to foster better conditions for sustainability (political will, resources, etc.) should be developed. It is vital that a critical mass be created through rigorous processes of transference and follow-up in order to facilitate and increase the learning processes. In this sense, there are two groups of stakeholders which have been marginalized and need to be more involved: relevant ministerial departments and teachers.

(viii) Promoting education as a human right

The YSP method should put more emphasis on promoting literacy training as a human right within the concept of the right to education. It should encourage participants to see literacy training processes as their legitimate right as citizens. It should promote participatory approaches and ensure that the participants understand that their role is not merely restricted to being trained but is to also make specific demands regarding the processes based on their needs.

CONCLUSION

38. The *Yo sí puedo* method is a valuable strategy for combating illiteracy in the region. In this regard, the horizontal support and solidarity of Cuba is appreciated. Nevertheless, it would not be viable to take it as an exclusive or an excluding method. It is suggested that the impact of the YSP method be enhanced based on the recommendations contained in this report – above all in its conceptual framework, cultural and linguistic adaptation, guarantee of sustainability and national ownership, information transparency, and synergy with other methods and stakeholders.

Proposed draft decision

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

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling 171 EX/ Decision 62 and 174 EX/Decision 44,
2. Having examined document 175 EX/9,

3. Expresses its appreciation to the Government of Cuba for the bilateral support and solidarity it has extended to other countries in the region through *Yo sí puedo*,
4. Takes note of the major findings of the study on the effectiveness and feasibility of the literacy method *Yo sí puedo*;
5. Encourages all participating countries and institutions to take into account the findings and recommendations of this study with a view to improving the *Yo sí puedo* method and approach;
6. Recognizes the complexity and multi-faceted character of literacy as well as the multitude of other methods and programmes that exist to combat illiteracy around the world;
7. Requests the Director-General to carry out a comprehensive stocktaking of the different literacy approaches and methodologies in order to advise Member States appropriately, in recognition of their specific needs and circumstances, in achieving EFA Goal 4 and the objectives of the United Nations Literacy Decade.