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UNITED NATIONS LITERACY DECADE (2003-2012): PROGRESS REPORT 2006-2007

SUMMARY

In pursuance of 169 EX/Decision 3.4.3 and 172 EX/Decision 9, the Director-General reports on the progress made in the implementation of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) (2003-2012), both at international and regional levels during 2006-2007.

Decision proposed: paragraph 27.

INTRODUCTION

1. By resolution 56/116, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) proclaimed the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) (2003-2012), and by resolution 57/166, welcomed the UNLD Plan of Action. The global launch of the UNLD took place at United Nations Headquarters in New York in February 2003. UNESCO was designated as coordinating agency for the Decade.

2. The UNLD Plan of Action links literacy closely with other aspects of human development. A theme has been identified for each two-year period of the Decade: literacy and gender (2003-2004); literacy and sustainable development (2005-2006); literacy and health (2007-2008); literacy and empowerment (2009-2010); and literacy and peace (2011-2012).

3. UNESCO submitted its second biennial report on UNLD progress to the UNGA at its 61st session. Based on a questionnaire sent to a wide range of stakeholders, the report drew a picture of worldwide response to the Decade according to its six key areas of action. The report concluded that literacy for all is possible only through an integrated and comprehensive education policy, planning and quality provision that links formal, non-formal and informal education, as well as the sustained political and financial commitment of stakeholders. The recommendations were phrased as challenges to governments, the international community and UNESCO to make this happen.

4. The Executive Board, by 169 EX/Decision 3.4.3 and 172 EX/Decision 9, requested the Director-General to report on the progress made in the implementation of the United Nations Literacy Decade, both at international and regional levels during 2006-2007. This document contains highlights from the report submitted to the UNGA at its 61st session.

RAISING THE PROFILE OF THE DECADE: CONFERENCES IN SUPPORT OF GLOBAL LITERACY

The White House Conference

5. The UNLD received a particular boost with the White House Conference on Global Literacy held in September 2006 in New York and hosted by Mrs Laura Bush, First Lady of the United States of America and Honorary Ambassador for the UNLD. Organized in collaboration with UNESCO, the Conference brought together ministers of education from 39 countries, 30 First Ladies or spouses of national leaders, and representatives of numerous private foundations and civil society organizations. Practical information was exchanged on successful programmes that promote literacy as a catalyst to advancing social and economic participation, human development and poverty reduction. Particular themes covered included mother-child literacy and inter-generational learning, literacy for health and literacy for economic self-sufficiency.¹

6. Given the relative neglect of literacy needs by the international community, the White House Conference demonstrated the major impact that the commitment of one large country can have on improving the visibility of the global literacy challenge.

Regional literacy conferences

7. Building on the White House Conference, UNESCO is organizing six regional or subregional conferences during 2007 and 2008. The first – in Doha, Qatar – took place in March 2007. The others are scheduled as follows:

East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific	Beijing, China	31 July-1 August 2007
Sub-Saharan Africa	Bamako, Mali	10-12 September 2007

¹ Further information on the White House Conference can be obtained from www.globalliteracy.gov.

South, South-West and Central Asia	New Delhi, India	29-30 November 2007
Latin America and the Caribbean	San José, Costa Rica	12-14 May 2008
Europe	Baku, Azerbaijan	September 2008

8. These conferences focus on both specific regional issues and cross-cutting themes, including: literacy policies and strategies, costs and financing; programme delivery; and benchmarking, monitoring and evaluating literacy. Four further themes are being addressed through examining effective regional practices: mother-child literacy and inter-generational learning; literacy for health; literacy for economic self-sufficiency; and literacy and ICTs.

9. One of the main objectives of the conferences is to build cooperation among stakeholders and to mobilize partners and resources for concrete interventions at the country level. The follow-up to the meetings will monitor changes in literacy policies and budget allocations. The ultimate aim is to assist countries in addressing their literacy challenges in order to make a real and measurable impact on the life of their populations, thus contributing to sustainable human development and poverty reduction. Following the pattern set by the White House Conference, a particular feature of the series of events is to engage the goodwill and influence of First Ladies in advocacy for literacy work.

Qatar

10. The first UNESCO Regional Conference in Support of Global Literacy took place in Doha, Qatar, from 12 to 14 March 2007, under the auspices of Her Highness Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned. co-organized by UNESCO and the Qatar Foundation, the Conference was attended by five First Ladies, 17 ministers, two permanent secretaries, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors, United Nations agencies, representatives from civil society, universities and research institutes, multilateral and bilateral organizations, publishers, writers and the media.

11. Recognizing the region's particular challenges, the following key approaches received broad support: the right to literacy for all, with special regard for women and girls; the need for support to be extended to countries affected by conflict; the responsibility of a wide range of ministries and partners, in particular NGOs, in promoting adult literacy; and the need for additional resources to achieve the literacy goals.

12. The Conference triggered new commitment for literacy in the Arab States, identified a range of innovative and proven practices, and promoted a strong partnership in support of literacy with a focus on the region's LIFE countries (Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan and Yemen). It called on the 2007 Arab Summit to place literacy high on its agenda and support a regional programme for literacy, and urged national governments to implement its recommendations. It also proposed establishing a regional fund to support effective programmes and new initiatives for literacy. The protection of education in crisis and post-conflict situations, in particular in Iraq, was designated as a priority for the international community. UNESCO was requested to set up a working group to support follow-up of the conference outcomes.²

Other conferences in 2007

13. The Beijing, Bamako and New Delhi Conferences will take place in 2007. In addition to the cross-cutting themes, specific areas of concern for each region will be examined: literacy in a multilingual context and literacy and rural development (China); languages in literacy and basic education and HIV and AIDS education (Mali); and literacy and gender, with an additional panel on "from literacy to lifelong learning" (India).

² Further information on the Conferences can be obtained at www.unesco.org/education/en/literacy/conferences.

FROM PLANNING TO IMPLEMENTATION: ACTIONS IN FAVOUR OF LITERACY

14. Building on the impetus of the Global Literacy Conferences, six key areas for action and progress within the framework of the UNLD are being targeted:

Policy	The Arab States conference has led both to heightened policy dialogue at national level (e.g. between government and CSOs in Algeria) and to stronger regional interaction, recognizing innovative policies developed in partnership (e.g. the Qatar Foundation-supported literacy and vocational training project).
Programme modality	The regional conferences' agenda includes the examination of good examples of literacy programmes, chosen for their effectiveness, sustained impact, contribution to other aspects of development (e.g. health) and use of innovations. These examples are being made available to Member States through the UNESCO literacy portal. Moreover, the conferences consider programme content and delivery addressing challenges and achievements in curriculum and materials development as well as pedagogical approaches.
Capacity-building	There has been little action in this area at international level. A new basis for capacity-building will be developed as part of the planning for the second half of the Decade.
Research	Two areas of research will form part of the mid-Decade review: assessment of existing literacy initiatives and their impact on development; and analysis of current effective and innovative practices in literacy work, with a view to addressing obstacles to literacy opportunities.
Community participation	Work on this topic has been integrated into the assessment of good practices. As representatives of community-based initiatives, CSOs are participating in the regional conferences. The Collective Consultation of NGOs on EFA (CCNGO/EFA) provides an international network for accessing experiences of community participation.
Monitoring and evaluation	The Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) has undertaken pilot studies and is currently being assessed at UIS for viability as a model that may be generalized beyond the initial pilot countries. Its advantages in improving monitoring of literacy levels must be balanced with the investment required and prospects for using its results. Aside from the need for data on literacy levels, countries require reliable information on the non-formal education sector. As a response, UNESCO has developed an easy-to-use methodology and database for setting up a Non-Formal Education Management Information System (NFE-MIS), which is now being implemented in Bangladesh, Morocco, Niger, Senegal and the United Republic of Tanzania. Planning for the mid-Decade review (due September 2008) began in mid-2007. The review will take a forward-looking approach aimed at boosting literacy action at global, regional and national levels during the second half of the Decade (2008-2012).

ADVOCATING FOR LITERACY

International Literacy Days

15. Under the theme “Literacy sustains development”, International Literacy Day was celebrated throughout the world on 8 September 2006, with the support of UNESCO. A promotional video on the need for literacy for social and personal development, produced by the Dakar Regional Bureau for Education, was broadcast in sub-Saharan countries. The Bangkok Regional Bureau for Education reported events in Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Nepal, Viet Nam and China.

16. The 2007 version will focus on the links between literacy and health care, nutrition, family and reproductive health, and health-related community development. Various events are planned, including an international celebration in Bamako, Mali, in association with the Regional Conference on Global Literacy, the UNESCO literacy prizes award ceremony and the simultaneous launch in Paris, Mantova (during a major international literature festival) and Bamako of *Writers for literacy*, a collection of short texts by internationally acclaimed writers advocating literacy and the promotion of a sustainable literate environment. A documentary film on literacy and health produced by UNESCO will be disseminated worldwide. Regional and national celebrations are also planned.

International Literacy Prizes

17. At a ceremony held at UNESCO Headquarters, five international UNESCO literacy prizes were awarded in 2006 for outstanding contributions and innovative practices in providing literacy opportunities.³ The call for candidates for 2007 is currently in progress. The International Jury for the award of the Literacy Prizes will meet at UNESCO Headquarters from 2 to 6 July 2007.

“Hope and solidarity through ballgames”

18. This programme uses the values of sports (respect, solidarity, tolerance and team spirit) as a way to help street children reintegrate into society. Learning centres are created to offer basic non-formal education and sports activities. During 2006-2007, a total of 1,700 street children, in Brazil, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Iran, Mali, Niger, Peru and Senegal, benefited from literacy courses and vocational skills workshops (carpentry, electricity, crafts, plumbing, etc.). Each learning cycle lasts between two and three years with new beneficiaries selected every two years. Activities also included symbolic sporting events for a total of 2,000 out-of-school and in-school children in the Republic of Congo and French Guyana. The programme contributed to increasing the visibility of the UNLD through cooperation with sports personalities (Marie-José Péric, Mikaël Silvestre, Christian Karembou, Raï, Lizarazu, Mahyar Monshipour) sponsors, foundations and the media.

IDENTIFYING GOOD PRACTICES IN LITERACY THROUGH RESEARCH: STRENGTHENING LINKS WITH EFA

19. Up-to-date research is a crucial component in accurately identifying country needs and appropriate responses. The EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR), whose focus in 2006 was on “Literacy for Life”, continues to provide a strong platform for advocacy in favour of investment in literacy. The 2007 edition, on the theme of early childhood care and education, noted that early intervention improves language skills and strengthens the basis for literacy acquisition.

³ UNESCO International Reading Association Literacy Prize (awarded to the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) of Pakistan); UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prizes (Mother Child Education Foundation of Turkey and Youth and Adult Literacy and Education Chair of the Latin American and Caribbean Pedagogical Institute of the Republic of Cuba); UNESCO Confucius Prizes for Literacy (Ministry of National Education of the Kingdom of Morocco and Rajasthan Directorate of Literacy and Continuing Education); Honourable Mention of the UNESCO International Reading Association Literacy Prize (Literacy Co-ordination Office of Yunnan Province, People’s Republic of China).

20. The report also proposed a useful conceptual framework and monitoring strategy for EFA Goal 3 in terms of the provision, participation, access and outcomes of non-formal education among young people and adults. An online consultation organized by the GMR in 2007 on the nature of the literate environment followed up on the 2006 report and will serve as groundwork for further research on this topic within the framework of the UNLD.

21. Two substantive issues continue to be debated in the context of the UNLD:

- The value of a universal definition of literacy. Currently, UNESCO works with a definition adopted in 2003 for the purposes of literacy assessment. This definition, which does not claim to be universal or definitive, takes the perspective of the benefits offered by literacy to individuals and societies, rather than levels of competence;
- The UNLD is about literacy for all. To date, the focus has been largely on adults. For the second half of the Decade, it is essential that access to high-quality literacy opportunities be promoted for both children and adults. Failure to do so would perpetuate the unfortunate situation, observable in certain contexts, in which the low quality of learning in schools feeds the numbers of adults without literacy competencies.

IMPLEMENTING UNESCO INITIATIVES IN FAVOUR OF LITERACY: THE LIFE PROGRAMME

22. The Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) is UNESCO's programmatic contribution to the UNLD and a key global strategic framework for its implementation. Initiated in 2005, it will continue through 2015, thus taking the same target date as both EFA and the MDGs. It is also the United Nations' main multilateral response to the challenge of the Decade. Focused on 35 countries with particularly significant literacy needs, it addresses four strategic areas that echo the UNLD areas for action: advocacy and communication; policy for sustainable literacy; strong national capacity; and innovation. During 2006, responsibility for LIFE was transferred to the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), where the necessary networks with the countries involved are being built. For the first implementation phase, the following countries have been selected: Bangladesh, Egypt, Haiti, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sudan and Yemen. Three regional planning meetings for LIFE implementation were held in March 2006. Needs assessment has or is being undertaken in all LIFE first-phase countries. Literacy plans have also been prepared, using to the extent possible existing planning processes such as UNESS or FTI plans. One of the main challenges is how to advocate a global framework which ensures that programmes are tailored to specific country needs. All first-round LIFE countries received core funding from UNESCO's regular budget in 2006-2007. Moreover, Bangladesh, Egypt, Morocco, Niger, Pakistan and Senegal are receiving extrabudgetary funds of around US \$1,000,000 for the first two years in support to LIFE.

REPORTING ON PROGRESS MADE: THE UNLD MID-DECADE REVIEW

23. The United Nations General Assembly resolution 61/140, laid special emphasis on cooperation among stakeholders in the promotion and monitoring of the Decade, and requested UNESCO to "reinforce its lead role in coordinating and catalysing the Decade's activities at the regional and international levels, prepare and conduct the mid-Decade review in collaboration with all Decade partners during 2007 and 2008 and submit its results to the General Assembly".

24. This review process is a key opportunity to set a clear direction for the promotion of literacy for the next five years in all key areas of the UNLD Plan of Action. The review will build on the evidence and analysis presented in the 2006 GMR, showing ways in which the Decade is addressing the worldwide literacy situation and identifying next steps. It will also use the momentum generated from the regional conferences to promote stronger policies and greater

investment in literacy. Concrete actions to make the second half of the Decade more effective will be identified.

25. UNESCO's group of international resource persons, created in 2003-2004 in order to provide a professional and technical sounding board for the Decade, must now be restructured to provide specific inputs into the mid-Decade review process. A UNLD Experts Group will meet this need and will hold its first meeting in September 2007, with revised terms of reference, clearer aims and responsibilities, and a balanced composition in terms of professional expertise, regional representation and gender.

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

26. The UNLD stands at a critical juncture. In 2008, it will reach its halfway point. To give it the profile it deserves, links with partners must become stronger, particularly at the national level. This will in turn require more vigorous articulation of the connections between a strongly literate population and other aspects of development – both the functional outcomes encapsulated in the MDGs and the sociocultural outcomes embodied in rights-based approaches and the affirmation of cultural diversity. As coordinating agency of UNLD and other international initiatives, UNESCO will work harder to integrate UNLD with EFA, the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) and the Global Initiative on HIV/AIDS and Education (EDUCAIDS). The Organization will also enhance advocacy efforts with international partners so that literacy may become an essential part of their vision and thus move higher up the collective development agenda. The immediate task is to design the 2008 mid-Decade review process in such a way that it becomes a robust platform for greater efforts in literacy during the second half of the Decade.

PROPOSED DRAFT DECISION

27. The Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling 169 EX/Decision 3.4.3 and 172 EX/Decision 9,
2. Having examined document 177 EX/8,
3. Reaffirming the importance of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) (2003-2012) in contributing to the achievement of Education for All (EFA) goals and in complementing international poverty reduction initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),
4. Also reaffirming the importance of the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) as a key global strategic framework for the implementation of the UNLD,
5. Taking note of the significance of the forthcoming UNESCO regional conferences in support of global literacy to rally high political commitment to address the main literacy challenges specific to each region and to identify the way forward, to build effective partnerships among all the stakeholders and mobilize resources needed for achieving the goals of the UNLD and its International Plan of Action, with the ultimate aim to make a real and measurable impact on the life of children, young people and adults, which should contribute to sustainable human development and poverty reduction,
6. Expressing its satisfaction with the activities undertaken, in particular the UNESCO Regional Conferences in Support of Global Literacy, which build on the White House Conference on Global Literacy and contribute to a major drive to promote literacy at

national, regional and international levels as one of the major EFA goals and as a foundation of lifelong learning,

7. Recognizing the strategic importance of the mid-Decade review to not only assess progress made so far, but to identify ways to propose concrete steps and actions that seriously address the challenges facing literacy for all during the second half of the Decade,
8. Recalling United Nations General Assembly resolution 61/140 inviting Member States and all stakeholders to intensify their efforts to implement effectively the UNLD International Plan of Action and to further cooperate in promoting and monitoring the Decade,
9. Requests the Director-General to conduct the mid-Decade review in collaboration with all Literacy Decade partners during 2007-2008 and to submit its results to the United Nations General Assembly at its 63rd session as well as to ensure adequate resources for the review;
10. Further requests the Director-General to make available the outcomes of the regional conferences in support of global literacy, such as recommendations for effective literacy policies, strategies, programme delivery, monitoring and evaluation, and information on innovations and effective practices;
11. Calls upon the Director-General to ensure that literacy continues to be one of the top priorities on the EFA agenda, in particular through the implementation of UNLD and LIFE;
12. Invites the Director-General to continuously monitor the progress of the Decade and submit a report on that progress to the United Nations General Assembly at its 63rd session and to the Executive Board at its 182nd session in autumn 2009.