

Partners Reception

4 May 2023

Hamburg Representation in Berlin

Speech by David Atchoarena, Director, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

Distinguished guests,

Dear colleagues,

Dear friends,

It is with mixed emotions that I stand before you today, as I prepare to step down as Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, UIL. While I am delighted to be here once again, at the Hamburg Representation in Berlin, I know it is for the last time, as I will soon take up a new responsibility. Over the past five years, I have had the honor and privilege of serving alongside some of the most talented educational professionals from all around the world, all committed to serve the cause of lifelong learning and to assist countries in their efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4.

As I look back on my time in this position, I am struck by the incredible progress we have made together. Despite many remaining challenges, lifelong learning is no longer a dream, it is becoming a reality expressed in legislations, policies, programmes and, to some extent, funding. The promise of technology to make learning - anywhere, anytime, anything - possible is rapidly being fulfilled, and UIL was able to reposition its work to reflect, take stock, and build upon the opportunities of the digital era.

We also recognize that, yes, technology-driven progress is substantial but everywhere inequalities are on the rise. This is one of the challenges that UIL intends to contribute to address in the coming years.

For the past 5 years our engagement with member states has intensified to shape lifelong learning policies, to build capacities, to advance knowledge and promote international cooperation. None of this would have been possible without the support of UIL's host country Germany, through the Deutsche Bundestag, the Federal Foreign Office, the German Commission for UNESCO and the city of Hamburg, and the intense partnership with several German academic and development institutions. Your continued commitment to our shared mission and common vision has been key to our achievements.

Among the many accomplishments of UIL in recent years I would like to highlight 4.

The first area where we have made significant progress is in our capacity to support member states to develop lifelong learning policies. Through mobilizing minds and expertise from around the world we have been able to shape new policy support tools, to generate policy relevant knowledge, and to

strengthen institutional capacities in several countries, through the establishment of the UIL learning hub.

The second area where advancements have been impressive is the Global Network of Learning Cities. Today, thanks to UIL's work on learning cities, there is a growing recognition of the role that cities can play to promote lifelong learning as a fundamental human right and as an instrument of sustainable development. The network now includes close to 300 members from more than 70 countries, and we expect many more to join this year after the admission cycle that was just opened. The Strategy adopted by the cities has proven to be an effective instrument to stimulate and focus exchanges and collaboration. During the COVID-19 pandemic the UIL-enabled exchanges within the network on how to ensure continuity of learning have clearly shown the very tangible benefits of joining this network. Tens of thousands of actors joined these exchanges and the wish to collaborate on promoting lifelong learning is undiminished.

Next year, the network will host the 6th International Conference on Learning Cities with a focus on climate action. I am very pleased to see the growing interest of cities in Germany for the Network, clearly also visible in our new cooperation project on educational planning in German cities, implemented together with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. I am also proud of the active participation of our host city of Hamburg which has been doing a fantastic job, jointly with Shanghai to guide the network's activities on education for sustainable development.

Monitoring is not the most appealing area of UIL's work, yet it is fundamental to measure progress and guide policies. I am proud of the two Global Reports on Adult Learning and Education – we call them GRALE - that were produced during the past 5 years. They provided insights on the status of adult learning and education across the globe and identified gaps and innovations. The latest report, GRALE 5, laid the ground for the discussion at the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII), another great achievement for UIL. The constructive intergovernmental dialogue that took place during the conference gave birth to a strong outcome document: the Marrakech Framework for Action, that will guide public policies for adult learning and education over the next decade. The active engagement and support of German partners at CONFINTEA, before the conference, and now for the follow-up have been highly instrumental to achieving strong results.

Finally, I would like to mention the latest developments within the Global Alliance for Literacy, including the launch of an innovative programme to strengthen the digital competencies of literacy instructors in 5 countries: Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Morocco, and Nigeria. Can technology really make a difference to scale up literacy interventions, enhance quality of learning and create a sustainable literate environment? What competencies must literacy instructors possess to leverage the full potential of technology for learning? These are precisely the questions UIL is addressing with this innovative initiative which aims at training 100,000 educators.

I believe it is fair to say that UIL, hand in hand with many German experts, has been doing pioneer work, at international level, on adult literacy. It is now time to explore how technology can contribute to making the right to education throughout life a reality, combat social exclusion and give people a second chance.

Together, we have worked tirelessly to advance our cause, lifelong learning, to improve the lives of millions of people, and to build a brighter, more sustainable future for generations to come. We have faced many challenges along the way, COVID-19 has caused severe disruptions to our work and jeopardized our financial health, but we have never lost sight of our mandate, and we have always been able to count on you for support.

As I prepare to take up new responsibilities, I want to express my deepest gratitude to all of you. Your trust, your continued support and your commitment to our shared vision have been a constant source of encouragement for me. I will continue to cherish the memories of our collaboration, and to be proud of what we have accomplished.

The Director General just designated a UIL interim Director, Mr Borhene Chakroun, Director of the Division for Lifelong Learning Systems and Policies at UNESCO. This decision is a guaranty of continuity and stability. As I pass the torch to him, while the recruitment process for a new Director is initiated, I have every confidence that UIL will continue to thrive and to make a meaningful difference in the world. I look forward to following the continued progress and future achievements of UIL.

Thank you once again for your support, your partnership, and your friendship over the past five years. It has been an honor and a privilege to work with you.

Thank you !