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Making the case for lifelong learning



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The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) is a non-profit, policy-driven, international research, training, information, documentation and publishing centre of UNESCO. One of six educational institutes of UNESCO, UIL promotes lifelong learning policy and practice with a focus on adult and continuing education, especially literacy and non-formal education and alternative learning opportunities for marginalized and disadvantaged groups. UIL's activities are geared towards achieving the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) along with the objectives of the International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA) series, the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD), the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), and the UNESCO Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE). UIL answers to the concerns of Member States, giving priority to Africa, Least Developed Countries and E-9 countries. UIL provides technical support to Member States, including consulting services and programme monitoring and evaluation. UIL enhances literacy and non-formal education, and adult and lifelong learning through advocacy and networking, research and capacity-building.

Organisation

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning works in close cooperation with UNESCO Headquarters, the regional, cluster and field offices of UNESCO as well as its sister Institutes. Its Governing Board, which meets annually to review work performed and plan future policy, consists of 12 educationists recruited worldwide and appointed by the Director-General of UNESCO, as is its Director. Among the 30 members of its workforce are education and social science researchers, librarians and publications staff along with administrative, secretarial and technical personnel. The Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg provides the Institute with a villa registered as an historic monument on premises close to the University of Hamburg, with which the Institute enjoys an increasingly strong partnership.

To enhance the capacities of UNESCO Members States to reduce barriers to basic education for young people, UIL launched a research and policy dialogue process. The objectives are: 1) to identify appropriate means to reach vulnerable youth through literacy and life skills education; 2) to disseminate relevant evidence; and 3) to develop concrete activities that will aid in building partnerships.

Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan and Yemen). Both forums provided spaces for policy-makers, practitioners and young learners to examine national policies on youth and education, to discuss access to literacy and life skills education, and to share innovative practices that respond to the particular needs of vulnerable youth. Based on this dialogue, strategies on how to implement targeted programmes in each country were developed, and immediate points for actions were suggested.

Literacy and Life Skills Education for Vulnerable Youth

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) promotes lifelong learning policy and practice with a focus on adult learning and education, especially literacy and non-formal education for marginalized and disadvantaged groups. The Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI)¹ in 2009 considered the large numbers of young people who lack access both to learning opportunities and to employment. The Conference's outcome document, *The Belém Framework for Action: Harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education for a viable future*², emphasized the need to address the learning needs of youth and adults in a holistic and comprehensive system of lifelong learning.

Following up on the Belém Framework, UIL identified young people with little or no experience of school as a target group for research and policy dialogue, with the aim of increasing participation by this group in non-formal education. Low levels of literacy and life skills limit their opportunities in life, including access to employment and/or technical and vocational training. Data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) indicates over 122 million young people worldwide lack basic reading and writing skills. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 3 out of 10 young people are illiterate (26.3 million young women and 18.9 million young men).

RESEARCH

As a first step, a multi-country study was undertaken in cooperation with the *Canadian International Development Agency* (CIDA). Policies and practices in 15 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America were mapped in order to gain a better understanding of how access to relevant learning opportunities for vulnerable youth can be improved. This study showed that effective programmes have common features, such as targeting a specific group of young people and recognising structural and personal reasons for vulnerability. The research also showed that effective basic education and literacy programmes are rarely "stand-alone", but rather are integrated into vocational and skills training programmes. They also tend to rely on partnerships with a variety of stakeholders. Involving the young people themselves at different stages, from policy design to programme formulation, was also identified as a key factor in the success of non-formal education measures.

WAYS FORWARD

Drawing on the lessons learned in these two policy forums, and on the recommendations of the study, UIL is drafting guidelines on how to work with marginalized youth, both for advocacy and programming purposes. In addition, UIL and the UNESCO offices in Africa, in cooperation with the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and CIDA, aim to identify further factors conducive to successful policies and practices for youth with limited education in Africa, and to formulate concrete proposals for a collaborative regional action plan. One proposal under discussion is an online network of practitioners and youth organisations that will exchange policies and programme documents on literacy and life skills education for vulnerable youth in Africa. A policy forum in Asia is also being planned.

POLICY DIALOGUE

Two policy forums were organised by UIL and its partners to disseminate the research findings from this study, and to further discuss its outcomes in 2011. Co-organized with CIDA and UNESCO Bamako, the "Africa Policy Forum on Literacy and Basic Life Skills for Vulnerable Youth", which took place in Mali, brought together participants from seven West African countries (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone), as well as representatives from bilateral and multilateral agencies. The other forum, entitled "Literacy and Life Skills for Vulnerable Youth: Policy Forum in the Arab States", was co-organized by UNESCO Cairo, UNESCO Rabat and the Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute (DEDI). It took place in Egypt and involved eight Arab countries (Algeria, Egypt,



¹ <http://uil.unesco.org/home/programme-areas/adult-learning-and-education/confintea-portal/>

² <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001877/187789m.pdf>