

National Training Workshop on Innovative Concepts and Systems of Lifelong Learning

Tehran, 11 to 14 February 2013

FINAL REPORT





Opening Ceremony



Plenary Sessions



Presentation by Jin Yang (UIL)



Presentation by Jørn Skovsgaard (Denmark)



Group Discussions



Group Discussions



Presentation of Group Work



Closing Ceremony

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Executive summary

To promote sustainable economic and social development, Iran needs to pursue further innovation in education, to produce high-quality human resources and active citizens that possess strong life skills, social and entrepreneurial capacities, employability and creativity.

Against this backdrop, the Ministry of Education of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO and the UNESCO Tehran Cluster Office requested the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) to provide technical support in organising a National Training Workshop on Innovative Concepts and Systems of Lifelong Learning in Tehran from 11 to 14 February 2013.

The overall aim of the workshop was to reinforce the capacity of leading policy-makers and policy-driven researchers at national level to develop and to implement innovative policies and strategies that will help strengthen a lifelong learning system and make lifelong learning for all a reality. Forty-four national policy-makers and experts in education, higher education, health, labour and other related fields with direct responsibilities for education and human resources development participated in the workshop.

The workshop was organised in an interactive and participatory manner and combined presentations, group work and discussions on a range of themes covering concept of lifelong learning:

- Analysis of socio-economic, political and cultural demands for quality human resources and active citizens in Iran;
- Building blocks of a lifelong learning system and how they can be integrated;
- Inclusive learning from basic to higher education;
- Reinvigorating learning in communities and families;
- Effective learning for and in the workplace;
- Extending the use of modern learning technologies;
- Recognition of outcomes of all forms of learning; and
- Fundamental conditions for strengthening an integrated lifelong learning system.

Drawing key references from the participants, resource persons and through open discussions in the workshop, including the final remarks made by the Members of the Scientific Committee, the following tentative recommendations could be forwarded to the Iranian Authorities to develop a national lifelong learning policy framework:

- Raise awareness of the importance of developing a lifelong learning system in Iran;
- Enhance understanding of the social and economic demands for key competences;
- Re-define the purpose of education and learning, curricula and teaching/learning methods;
- Enhance equity, quality and relevance of education and learning;
- Strengthen coordination among various stakeholders;
- Decentralise decision-making and give more encouragement to local initiatives;
- Develop the capacities of policy-makers and experts; and
- Facilitate evidence-based analytic research to inform policy-making.

At the closing of the workshop, representatives of organisers, resource persons and participants agreed on a follow-up strategy.

1. Introduction

Background

Lifelong learning is a UNESCO priority set by its Member States, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, to promote every individual's right to education. The commitment of UNESCO's Member States to lifelong learning is expressed in two landmark reports: (1) *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow*, the report of the International Commission on the Development of Education (known as the Faure Report, 1972); and (2) *Learning: The treasure within*, the report of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century (known as the Delors Report, 1996). These reports have contributed to the development of policy and practice in lifelong learning and to the creation of learning societies in UNESCO Member States.

Lifelong learning encompasses formal, non-formal and informal learning. It emphasises the integration of learning and living and applies to all aspects of life – family, community, study, work and leisure – and all phases of an individual's life.

Lifelong learning in the Islamic Republic of Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran has made remarkable improvements in enrolment rates at all levels of education throughout the country. The education system has contributed significantly to building human resources and producing citizens capable of playing a full part in the country's social development and economic growth.

As a developing country and to promote sustainable development in both the economic and social sectors, Iran needs to pursue further innovation in education, to produce high-quality human resources and active citizens, who possess strong life skills, social and entrepreneurial capacities, employability and creativity.

Therefore, it is vital to continue exploring and adapting ways of improving quality and inclusion in education and learning; and equipping children, youth and adults with the necessary skills to adapt to a rapidly changing society. Lifelong learning for all has a crucial role to play as a master concept and guiding principle for education development and reform.

In response to the challenges of education development and reform, the Ministry of Education of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO and the UNESCO Tehran Cluster Office asked the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) to provide technical support in organising a National Training Workshop on Innovative Concepts and Systems of Lifelong Learning.

2. About the workshop

Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the workshop was to reinforce the capacity of leading national policy-makers and policy-driven researchers to create and implement policies and strategies that make lifelong learning for all a reality.

The major specific objectives of the workshop were:

- to articulate a sound conceptual understanding of lifelong learning and make a case for lifelong learning for all in the Islamic Republic of Iran;

- to discuss international experiences and successful stories, and generate innovative ideas to develop and implement a comprehensive national strategic document on lifelong learning;
- to develop a contingent of policy-makers and researchers to promote lifelong learning for all.

To meet these objectives and based on the advice of the Scientific Committee, the programme of the workshop was largely action-oriented. The detailed agenda of the workshop is provided in Annex 1.

Participants

The workshop had 44 (13 women and 31 men) participants, including:

- national policy-makers from education, higher education, health, labour and other fields with direct responsibility for education and human resource development;
- the Centre for Women's Affairs of the Presidential Office;
- leading researchers on education policy;
- experts from non-governmental organisations, such as the Iranian Scientific Society; and
- journalists from the Education Channel and other relevant sections of the media, including education-related media.

The participants were nominated by respective head of agencies. See annex 2 for list of participants.

Methodology

The workshop was organised in an interactive and participatory manner and combined **presentations, group work** and **discussions**. In the presentations, some examples of best practice and innovative approaches were introduced and discussed. In the group-work and discussions, participants reflected on key issues raised in the presentations and generated new ideas for strengthening lifelong learning for all in Iran. For the group work sessions, the participants were presented with a case of successful practice and were provided a set of questions to guide their discussion.

Resource persons

To reflect the state-of-the-art in lifelong learning policies and strategies at the national level and in the international community, experts from Iran, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and the Danish Ministry of Children and Education were invited to provide input and facilitate discussions in the workshop. A list of resource persons is provided in Annex 3.

3. Key inputs and reflections on nine themes

The workshop was opened by Dr Ali Asghar Yazdani, Vice Minister of Education for International Affairs & Schools Abroad of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Dr M. Reza Saeidabadi, Secretary General of the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO, and Ms Tarja Virtanen, Director of the UNESCO Tehran Cluster Office. The opening addresses emphasized that lifelong learning for all is a UNESCO priority set by its Member States, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, to promote every individual's right to education. Moreover, they pointed out the development challenges that Iran is facing, including the challenges emerging from the employment market, urbanization and migration, and bearing in mind the high proportion of youth in the Iranian population, as well as other social and economic challenges. They argued that it is vital to continue exploring ways to improve quality

and inclusion in education and learning, equipping children, youth and adults with the necessary competences to adapt to a rapidly changing society.

The workshop had the following themes:

- Theme 1: Concept of lifelong learning;
- Theme 2: Analysis of socio-economic, political and cultural demands for quality human resources and active citizens in Iran;
- Theme 3: Building blocks of a lifelong learning system and how they can be integrated;
- Theme 4: Inclusive learning from basic to higher education;
- Theme 5: Reinvigorating learning in communities and families;
- Theme 6: Effective learning for and in the workplace;
- Theme 7: Extended use of modern learning technologies;
- Theme 8: Recognition of outcomes of all forms of learning;
- Theme 9: Fundamental conditions for strengthening an integrated lifelong learning system.

The following sections provide a summary of inputs from resource persons and discussions among participants in each theme.

Theme 1: The concept of lifelong learning

The inputs on this theme from resource persons – Jin Yang (UIL), Jørn Skovsgaard (Denmark) and Mehdi Navid (Iran) – provided an analytical review of developments in relation to the concept of lifelong learning and discussed the importance of lifelong learning policies. For human beings, living and learning are indeed synonymous; learning is an inseparable part of life. The notion of lifelong learning is not new and has been shared by many cultures, societies and religions. Lifelong education includes:

- Formal education: the highly institutionalized, chronologically graded and hierarchical 'education system', spanning early childhood development, lower primary school to the upper levels of university;
- Non-formal education: any organized, systematic, educational activity conducted outside the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children;
- Informal learning: the lifelong process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment.

Since the 1990s, there has been a shift in the policy discussions from 'lifelong education' to 'lifelong learning'.

The inputs received from the resource persons made a strong case for the importance of lifelong learning for all. These included the following key points:

- 1) We are living in a fast-changing and complex social, economic and political world, which demands adaptation by rapidly acquiring new knowledge, skills and attitudes. An individual will not be able to meet life challenges unless he or she becomes a lifelong learner, and a society will not be sustainable unless it becomes a learning society.
- 2) The development of a knowledge-based economy requires substantial efforts to upgrade workforce skills and knowledge.
- 3) Lifelong learning for all is about social cohesion. Basic skills such as literacy contribute to empowerment and civic participation.
- 4) Learning is crucial to improve the quality of life.

5) Lifelong learning contributes to sustainable development.

One of the critical issues related to the implementation of lifelong learning is how to reflect a society's socio-cultural heritage, economic and political drivers and demographic factors. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, there is a rich cultural background of lifelong learning and interest in lifelong learning. Moreover, lifelong learning is considered a highly significant issue in Islam. The famous declaration 'Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave' by the Prophet Mohammed, means continuous learning through the span of life irrespective of circumstances.

To put the concept of lifelong learning into practice, the Constitution of Iran stipulates that access to education at all levels is the indisputable right of all people in the national community. In particular, Iran has made remarkable improvements in enrolment ratios at all levels of education throughout the country, and gender parity has been achieved from early childhood care and education to higher education. The education system has contributed significantly to building human resources and citizens capable of playing their full part in the country's social development and economic growth. Meanwhile, the Government of Iran is working to meet the development challenges that the country is facing, including the challenges emerging from the employment market, urbanisation and migration, and bearing in mind the significant proportion of youth in the population, as well as other social and economic challenges. To ensure the availability of diverse learning environments, research centres, culture houses, public libraries, exhibitions and specialised museums of science and technology, entrepreneurship centres, stadiums and other similar centres are encouraged to provide non-formal and informal learning opportunities. In reforming the national curriculum, attention has been paid to an integrated approach and an emphasis on concepts, skills and basic ideas, enhancing the curiosity of the students and providing appropriate and necessary motivations for lifelong self-learning and self-improvement.

The following key steps to developing a lifelong learning system in Iran were highlighted by an Iranian resource person:

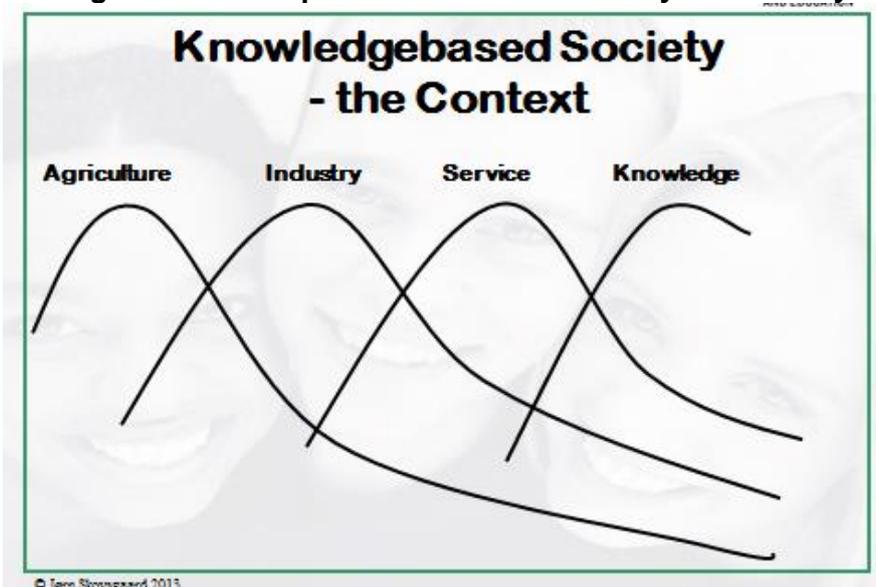
- Institutionalising the concept of lifelong learning in the education system;
- Promoting quality, fairness and relevance of education and learning;
- Giving equal attention to all forms of education and learning (formal, non-formal and informal);
- Ensuring the equitable allocation of resources to all sub-sectors of the education and learning system;
- Participation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the decision-making process.

Theme 2: Analysis of socio-economic, political and cultural demands for quality human resources and active citizens in Iran

Every country needs quality human resources and active citizens that can respond to the macro-environment, including political, economic, social, technological, legal, environmental, ethical and demographic factors. A prototype development pattern (diagram 1) to interpret the national context for lifelong learning strategies suggests that many countries have followed the same pattern from agricultural via industrial and service economies towards a knowledge-based economy. This prototype indicates that even though the pattern is general, it unfolds differently from one country to another. This difference is crucial to the strategies that can be successfully implemented. In a knowledge-based economy and society, the justification for lifelong learning includes enhancing employability (human capital), active citizenship (social cohesion), and personal fulfilment (cultural diversity). The

key competences required are: to act autonomously (conduct plans and projects, asserting rights, limits and needs); use tools (language, symbols, text, knowledge, information, technology) and interact in heterogeneous groups (cooperate and resolve conflicts).

Diagram 1: Development Pattern of Economy and Society



The inputs provided by the local resource person showed that the concept of lifelong learning is highly valued in Iran, and the country's current socio-economic development creates huge demands for quality human resources and active citizens. Table 1 provides a summary of the demands for key skills in Iran.

Table 1: Summary of the demands for key skills in Iran

Type of skill	Description of skills in demand
Political skills	Political understanding and interpretation, support for national interest and national unity, national defence and resistance
Social skills	Obedience to the law, accountability, tolerance, social understanding, social participation, consensus and unanimity, protection of social values, communication skills
Cultural skills	Cultural understanding, preservation and development of cultural heritage, cultural pluralism, national identity, aesthetic and artistic talent
Spiritual skills (religion and ethics)	Faith and religious beliefs, moral strength, self-dignity and self-esteem, emotional adjustment
Scientific skills	Scientific and logical thinking, basic knowledge, curiosity and questioning, critical thinking, creativity, foresight and planning, understanding of language and literature
Intercultural education (Global)	Understanding of other cultures, intercultural interaction, Islamic solidarity, peaceful and international understanding
Economic skills	Economic understanding, business knowledge, entrepreneurship, productivity, retention and development of national wealth, fiscal discipline
Technology skills	Technological knowledge, technological skills and technological thinking
Health skills	Physical, personal and social health, physical education
Environmental awareness	Urban ecosystems, natural habitats and wildlife, natural resources

During the group-work on this theme, the participants identified the following four categories of core values and key competences that twenty-first-century Iranian citizens should have:

- Faith in God, respecting rules, following ethics, sense of responsibility, acceptance of social norms, discipline, justice, friendship, esteeming national culture, humanitarianism, patriotism, accountability
- Scientific understanding, enquiring mind, intellect, creative thinking, entrepreneurial spirit, truth-seeking
- Happiness, self-awareness and self-esteem, optimism, bravery, honesty and devotion
- Preservation of the environment.

Theme 3: Building blocks of a lifelong learning system and how they can be integrated

It is a daunting task to translate the concept of lifelong learning into a policy framework. The inputs on this theme highlighted the following eight considerations:

- 1) Policies for building a lifelong learning system need to be supported by broad social consensus, legislative instruments and coordination mechanisms to facilitate collaboration between various stakeholders;
- 2) Building a lifelong learning system calls for increased financial investment in education and learning;
- 3) Diverse formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities must be developed and made equally accessible to all;
- 4) Formal learning opportunities provided by primary, secondary and higher education form the 'basic education' of modern society and should prepare students to become lifelong learners;
- 5) In order to ensure synergy between various learning systems, a learning outcomes-based qualifications framework or system is needed;
- 6) ICT and open learning approaches can be used to provide quality learning opportunities to all at reasonable cost;
- 7) Building a learning city, region or community can be an effective approach to embodying the philosophy of lifelong learning for all;
- 8) Effective policies for building a learning society need to be informed and inspired by research-based evidence.

The inputs also provided some examples of national lifelong learning policy frameworks in Turkey, Singapore, the Republic of Korea, China, Malaysia, Thailand and Viet Nam. The inputs highlighted tensions between curriculum-based and didactics-based systems and on the need to shift the focus of education systems from a narrow skills-based approach to competences that include skills, knowledge and attitudes. In all, the interventions strongly argued for a secular and evidence-based national lifelong learning policy framework.

The Iranian resource person described Iran's system of lifelong learning and its components. As shown in Table 2, many organisations are involved in providing lifelong learning opportunities.

Table 2: Current system of lifelong learning in Iran

Organization	Programmes initiatives
The Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and Parliament	Adoption of several important national policy documents
Ministry of Education	Literacy Movement Organization ICT application in education: smart schools E-learning for the world of work Teacher training centres and universities responsible for training teachers Family and citizens' skills training schemes
Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, universities, Ministry of Health & Medical Education	Interdisciplinary courses & studies Reform of higher education curricula Capacity building workshops for faculty members to improve their academic skills
Distance higher education (Payame Noor University)	Open and online education
Ministry of Health & Medical Education	Lifelong learning centres Healthy volunteers
Human resource management in all government ministries	Education on the job (industry and agriculture, industry and services, skills, knowledge and attitude)
Comprehensive University of Applied and Practical Sciences	National vocational qualification framework
Huzeh Elmieh Islamic Seminary	Religious, moral and citizenship education Educational activities in Mosques and cultural centres
Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance	Culture and art education
National Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization	Citizens and tourism education
Libraries	Reading, writing and other learning activities Digital Libraries
Vocational and technical education organisations	Vocational education for the unemployed Upgrading skills of employees Developing national skills standards Vocational education for prisoners Military education Rural vocational education, Entrepreneurial Education Centres National skill competitions Assessment of trainees' skills
Specialised scientific associations and non-governmental organisations	Informal learning opportunities (i.e., religious, charity activities)
National television	Life skills education Five different national and international television channels
Municipalities	Promoting culture and citizenship through education Organisation and development of cultural spaces
Museums	Informal learning opportunities offered by more than 300 museums

However, in spite of numerous programmes/activities going on in providing lifelong learning opportunities, the national lifelong learning system is far from satisfactory. One of the local resource persons presented an analytic overview on the current conditions of different aspects of the national lifelong learning system in Iran as in Table 3.

Table 3: Evaluation of Iran's progress in developing a national lifelong learning system

Different aspects of the lifelong learning system in Iran	Current condition
Existence of appropriate legislation	Good
Development of coordination mechanisms between all stakeholders	Weak
Increased investment in learning	Good
Developing diverse and inclusive learning opportunities (formal, non-formal and informal)	Significant improvement needed
Evolution of public schools, and technical, professional & higher education with a focus on lifelong learning	Acceptable
Understanding changes in economic structure and skill requirements	Weak
Synergies between different lifelong learning policies	Weak
Support the recognition, accreditation and validation of non-formal and informal learning.	Acceptable
Effective use of information and communication technology and open learning	Acceptable
Infrastructure to meet the lifelong learning needs of different age groups, and citizens with different socio-cultural, political and economic backgrounds	Acceptable
Focus on evidence-based research, monitoring & evaluation	Weak

Theme 4: Inclusive learning from basic to higher education

To broaden conceptual understanding of lifelong learning, inputs provided by resource persons referred to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2011) highlighting the nature of education and learning:

- **EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES:** deliberate activities, involving some form of communication intended to bring about learning.
- **COMMUNICATION:** a relationship between two or more persons or an inanimate medium and persons, involving the transfer of information (messages, ideas, knowledge, strategies, etc.). Communication may be verbal or non-verbal, direct/face-to-face or indirect/remote, and may involve a wide variety of channels and media.
- **LEARNING:** individual acquisition or modification of information, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values, skills, competencies or behaviours through experience, practice, study or instruction.

To develop inclusive learning from basic to higher education, the following principles must be embraced: the centrality of learners, enhancement of capabilities (knowledge, skills, attitudes, competences, etc.), improvement of teaching/learning effectiveness, development of higher-order thinking skills, and meeting the learning needs of vulnerable groups through provision of guidance, counselling and flexible learning opportunities.

The experience of Denmark offers an example of how to promote inclusive lifelong learning. The Danish lifelong learning system emphasises the importance of taking informal and non-formal learning patterns into account when setting up a systemic framework for lifelong learning. The following lessons that can be drawn from the Danish case:

- An efficient lifelong learning system addresses individual, local, regional and national needs;
- Mainstream education must keep an open door for adults who want to re-enter the education system, where traditional 'schooling' will not work;

- The lifelong learning system must provide both general and technical/vocational courses, ranging from basic skills needs to advanced courses at tertiary level and preparatory courses providing access to tertiary education in the mainstream system;
- Business and industry must acknowledge that the provision of education and training opportunities is becoming an increasingly important component of corporate social responsibility;
- Trade unions must support their members in gaining access to education and training;
- Governments must encourage partnerships between the government, employers and trade unions and provide additional funding for the schemes agreed by the partners. This kind of tri-partite governance framework will help to ensure quality, relevance and synergy.

Through group work, the participants critically reviewed the development of formal education in Iran and identified the following challenges:

- Discrepancy between the aims and outcomes of education;
- Lack of equity in education provision and process;
- Lack of understanding of and information on supply and demand for skills in labour market;
- The limited role of parents, industry and civil society in the education decision-making process;
- Lack of cooperation with key stakeholders in curriculum development
- Too much focus on obtaining academic degrees and negligence of practical life skills;
- Lack of provision of counselling and guidance to students;
- The dominance of teacher-centred pedagogy and ignorance of learners' active participation;
- Low motivation of teachers, lack of further training and professional development;
- Inefficient evaluation of the quality of education.

Meanwhile, the participants proposed the following policy considerations to improve formal education in Iran:

- Strengthen curriculum development and improve curriculum content;
- Pay attention to interdisciplinary courses and entrepreneurship training;
- Establish teacher training colleges and enhance teachers' competencies;
- Adopt innovative approaches in teaching/learning;
- Strengthen flexible evaluation of the quality of education;
- Expand the use of ICT in schools;
- Decentralise the management of the education system;
- Strengthen stakeholders' involvement in formal education and improve coordination with industry, business and parents.

Theme 5: Reinvigorating learning in communities and families

The presentations of resource persons provided some conceptual clarifications on the concepts of *community* (all the people living in a particular area or place), and *community learning* (informal learning and development with individuals and groups in their community). They also highlighted the importance of opportunities for informal learning in libraries, through civic engagement (voluntary community work), cultural experiences (museums, concert halls), sports and leisure, and e-learning. Reference was made to the *Bélem Framework for Action: Harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education for a viable future* (2009), which

specifically recommended creating multi-purpose community learning spaces and centres to improve access to, and participation in, the full range of adult learning and education programmes for youth and adults, in particular women. The inputs also provided some best-practice examples of how to promote learning in communities and families; most notably, community learning centres (CLCs) as venues for lifelong learning and family literacy/family learning approaches.

During group work, participants identified and reviewed the provision of learning opportunities in communities and families in recent years in Iran. Their conclusions may be summarised as follows:

- Learning opportunities in cultural, economic and health-related issues are offered by local councils, health houses and cultural centres;
- Health-related group learning activities by patients with particular conditions (i.e., diabetes and other chronic diseases);
- Cultural and religious activities in mosques and charitable organisations;
- Special training provision for housewives, female university students, and employed women;
- Education programmes for newly married couples;
- Establishment of ICT facilities;
- Development of learning environments in rural management centres;
- The provision of stable and mobile library services;
- Organisation of workshops in the fields of arts and culture.

The participants also elaborated on the following policy considerations for strengthening learning in families and communities in Iran:

- Expand adult education and provide lifelong learning opportunities in both governmental and non-governmental learning centres;
- Strengthen the role of the private sector in providing learning opportunities to citizens;
- Strengthen the use of ICT and e-learning;
- Establish a national qualification framework;
- Promotion of decentralisation in education and training management;
- Enhance family health education and increase public awareness of health issues.

Theme 6: Effective learning for and in the work place

The inputs provided by resource persons highlighted that, in the philosophy of education, one of its aims is preparation for work. Therefore, learning for and in the workplace is an integral part of lifelong learning. The growth of the globalised economy has changed the nature of products and services demanded, as well as technologies and forms of communication. As a result, enterprises need more skilled, dynamic and innovative workforces in order to maintain competitiveness and improve productivity.

The inputs also made a case for the development of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) by referring to the UNESCO Convention on Technical and Vocational Education (1989), the ILO conclusions concerning human resources training and development (2000) and UNESCO Revised Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education (2001). To improve the quality and relevance of TVET, the key messages of the Shanghai Consensus: Recommendations of the Third International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (2012) were presented. The presentations also made a case for workplace learning and building learning organisations by

underlining the organisational and individual benefits of workplace learning for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Given Iran's high youth unemployment rate (20% in 2008), the group work on the theme of learning for and in the workplace analysed the reasons for unemployment among young people. These include the following:

- Poor long-term social and economic development planning;
- Limited financial investment in creating jobs, resulting in insufficient job opportunities;
- Lack of a culture of entrepreneurship and insufficient entrepreneurs to create jobs;
- Insufficient industrial development due to uncontrolled import of consumer goods;
- Entrenched social and familial attitudes that denigrate vocational education and skills training;
- The youth population does not fit the requirement of job opportunities due to insufficiency and irrelevance of vocational education and training provision.

Furthermore, the group work reviewed some successful TVET activities in Iran including:

- Establishment of technical and vocational training universities and colleges ;
- Expansion of skills training opportunities such as short-term courses provided by technical and vocational training colleges and universities of applied sciences;
- Integration of skills training within the general education system;
- Continuing education for professions in the medical field;
- Provision of training for self-employment for women;
- Encouragement to students in the education system to receive skills training;
- University accreditation of on-the-job training and expansion of skills training centres.

Based on the above analysis and review, the participants also provided the following policy considerations for establishing a robust TVET system in Iran:

- Further develop formal technical and vocational education in pre-university education, with special focus on technical and vocational education (Fanni va Herfeh-yi) and work-knowledge (Kar-o danesh) training at upper secondary level;
- Establish a comprehensive programme for developing entrepreneurship and creating jobs;
- Conduct needs assessments of occupations, and build links between the labour market and skills training;
- Enhance knowledge management, review the relevance of curricula and quality of teaching/learning, and develop up-to-date technical and vocational courses;
- Provide more short-term training opportunities and provide accreditation to skills gained through on-the-job training;
- Provide further practical training to trainers and teachers;
- Establish a national policy-making and coordination centre for vocational education and training;
- Develop linkages between school education, vocational education and training, and higher education;
- Strengthen collaboration with NGOs.

Theme 7: Extended use of modern learning technologies

The input in this session highlighted the rapid expansion in the number of people using modern learning technologies. For example, in 2012, there were 2.3 billion internet users in the world. By 2025, this number is expected to reach 5 billion ([Monitor Group's Global Business Network and Cisco, 2010](#): 27) More and more learners are gaining access to massive online open courses (MOOC) which provide access to high-quality lessons, where people can learn anytime, anywhere and at their own pace, mostly for free. In Iran, projects such as the E-learning universities, Smart Schools and Rural ICT Centres have been implemented to expand the use of ICT in education and learning.

Practices have shown that modern learning technologies can help people to practice reading and writing. For example, the Reading for a Billion: Same Language Subtitling project in India, Mobile Based Post Literacy project in Pakistan and Worldreader project promoting digital books in Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Ghana) all increased learners' enthusiasm for reading and improved learning outcomes.

Theme 8: Recognition of outcomes of all forms of learning

The presentation in this session provided an introduction to the key messages of the UNESCO Guidelines for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning. However, qualifications systems in many societies focus on formal learning in educational institutions and ignore the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning. Practices in many countries have shown that the RVA of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning is a key lever to make lifelong learning for all a reality as it gives value to the hidden and unrecognised competences that people obtained in non-formal and informal learning settings.

Drawing inspiration from policies and practices in the international community, the UNESCO Guidelines suggested that the Member States establish RVA as a key component of a national lifelong learning strategy and proposed the following principles in developing a national RVA framework:

- Ensuring equity and inclusiveness in access to learning opportunities;
- Promoting the equal value of learning outcomes of formal, non-formal and informal learning;
- Ensuring the centrality of individuals in the RVA process;
- Improving flexibility and openness of formal education and training;
- Promoting quality assurance in the entire RVA process;
- Strengthening partnerships among all stakeholders.

The presentation by an Iranian resource person pointed out that links between employers, workers and vocational training providers are weak and there is no clear understanding of labour market needs by training providers. In fact, no governmental agency or department is responsible for needs assessment for vocational training. As a result, the existing professional competence tests are based on education standards or curriculum rather than standards of professional competence developed by industry experts. It is encouraging that the Iranian government decided in September 2012 to establish the National Vocational Qualification Framework in accordance with the International Standard of Classification of Education. This will ensure horizontal mobility between different educational sub-sectors. Several steps remain to be taken before the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning can be incorporated into the national qualification framework.

Theme 9: Fundamental conditions for strengthening an integrated lifelong learning system

In this session, examples of vision, political will and commitment to promoting lifelong learning in four developing countries (Turkey, Malaysia, South Africa and Viet Nam) were introduced. The key role of lifelong learning in realising Iran's vision of becoming a leading country in terms of economics, science, and technology in the region by 2025 was emphasised. Developing an integrated lifelong learning system requires participation of stakeholders in governance and decision making in order to guarantee responsiveness to the needs of all learners. Therefore, there is a need to create and maintain mechanisms for the involvement of public authorities at all administrative levels, as well as civil society organisations, social partners, the private sector.

Referring to the *Belém Framework for Action*, the presenter reminded the delegations from Member States that they had committed themselves to five clear measures:

- Seeking investment of at least 6% of GNP in education, and working towards increased investment in adult learning and education;
- Expanding existing educational resources and budgets across all government departments to produce an integrated adult learning and education strategy;
- Opening up existing transnational funding programmes to literacy and adult education;
- Creating incentives to promote new sources of funding, for example from the private sector, NGOs, communities and individuals, without prejudicing the principles of equity and inclusion; and
- Prioritising investment in lifelong learning for women, rural populations, and people with disabilities.

4. Suggestions for promoting lifelong learning for all in Iran

Lifelong learning for all embodies a vision of what a society wishes to become in the long term. Developing a lifelong learning system is a political process, and it requires political courage, steadfast commitment and pioneering spirit. Drawing reference from the comments of participants and resource persons, including in open workshop discussions and the final remarks of the Scientific Committee, some tentative recommendations could be forwarded to the Iranian Authorities to develop a national lifelong learning policy framework. They are presented here as the summary of the key outputs of the workshop.

- 1) **Raise awareness of the importance of developing a lifelong learning system in Iran.** In a knowledge-based society, lifelong learning for all throughout life and the integration of formal education, non-formal education and informal learning is indispensable. Owing to the dominance of formal education and university qualifications, non-formal education and informal learning are not duly recognised in the education system, and the economic sector has a tendency to give low recognition to certificates from vocational education and short-term training. In addition to the formal education system, other governmental organisations, institutions and business should also facilitate the creation of non-formal and informal learning opportunities. To achieve this, steadfast advocacy for a lifelong learning system among governmental organisations and other stakeholders is necessary.

- 2) **Enhance the understanding of the social and economic demands for key competences.** A lifelong learning system nurtures a culture of learning by surveying the learning requirements of all its citizens and providing the opportunities to satisfy them. However, education development in Iran seems to focus on 'provision', and there is insufficient indication of how to identify learning needs and the mechanisms to meet those needs. To achieve Iran's long-term developmental goal of becoming "a leading country in economy, science, and technology in the region by 2025" as set out in Iran Vision 2025 (national 20-year government plan), there is an urgent need to enhance citizens' competences and to find out what kinds of learning are needed to respond to existing and emerging challenges in social and economic development. It is important that the link between social and economic development and a lifelong learning system is underpinned by sound analysis and understanding of the demands for competences. The development of a lifelong learning system in Iran requires a shift from the supply-driven perspective to a demand-driven perspective responding to the learning aspirations of people and skill requirement for social and economic development.
- 3) **Re-define the purpose of education and learning, content of curricula and teaching/learning methods.** The workshop acknowledged that there are numerous opportunities provided by the public and private sectors in Iran that are contributing to lifelong learning. However, there is a weak link between education and economic, social and cultural realities. The existing education and learning opportunities are, in general, not fit for purpose for a wide range of learners. Development of a lifelong learning system necessitates the transformation of the existing education system. There is an urgent need to re-define the purpose of education, content of curricula and teaching/learning methods in response to the requirements of globalization, developments in science and technology, urbanisation and changes in the labour market.
- 4) **Enhance equity, quality and relevance of education and learning.** As Iranian society is undergoing rapid transformation, in addition to expanding access, it is imperative to enhance equity, quality and relevance of education and learning. In recent years, Iran has made significant progress in expanding access to all levels of education. However, the participants pointed out that there is a lack of equity in education provision and process, a discrepancy between the aims and outcomes of education, and inefficient evaluation of quality. To enhance equity and inclusion, programmes are needed to provide new learning opportunities to out-of-school children, women, the unemployed, people living in remote areas, and nomads. To enhance relevance and quality, in addition to responding to the demands for individual, community and societal core skills and competences, there is a need to adopt a competence-based approach in curriculum development, and shift from the teacher-centred paradigm to the learner-centred paradigm.
- 5) **Strengthen coordination among various stakeholders.** Lifelong learning is a social, political, economic, health-related and, sometimes even, a spiritual phenomenon. Therefore, it is critical to build real partnerships between all stakeholders and to mobilize their resources to develop a shared vision of lifelong learning. There have been some attempts in Iran to coordinate policy, programme design and delivery among different ministries and other stakeholders. At the workshop, many participants pointed out that coordination between primary/secondary education and higher education is poor, the relationship between formal education, non-formal education and informal learning is weak, and the role of civil society organisations and parents in

education decision-making is insufficient. In order to promote lifelong learning and human resource development for knowledge based economy, it is important to engage the private sector as stipulated in the Article 44 of the Constitution of Iran.

- 6) **Decentralise decision-making and give more encouragement to local initiatives.** In the field of lifelong learning, a local focus is needed as many learning opportunities takes place at the local level. It is challenging to build a lifelong learning system in a centralised and hierarchical society, as lifelong learning depends on the mobilisation of individuals, organisations and communities. To generate momentum for a lifelong learning system, innovative approaches need to be explored in promoting decentralisation and active participation of individuals, families, organisations and communities, cities, and provinces.
- 7) **Develop the capacity of policy-makers and experts.** Although the notion of lifelong learning has a long history in Iran, it is not a simple matter to develop a national lifelong learning system. This is because such a system challenges strongly-held views and understandings of knowledge and competences, of institutional power hierarchies, and of how education and training have been implemented over many years. The capacity of policy-makers and experts has to be substantially strengthened, not only in terms of conceptualising lifelong learning, but also in developing and promoting criteria and indicators, models and mechanisms, and operational action plans for a lifelong learning system. Meanwhile, in tandem with decentralisation, it is necessary to extend capacity building to provincial and local levels.
- 8) **Facilitate evidence-based analytic research to inform policy-making.** Lifelong learning policies and strategies cannot be developed through ideology and wishful thinking; they have to be based on sound understanding of operational mechanisms. There are many complex issues that can only be tackled through analytic research. In particular, evidence-based empirical research is necessary in the field of situation analysis, learning need assessment, and impact studies of policy and strategies. Observation of the discussion at the workshop seems to suggest that there is a lack of impact analysis of education development in Iran. For example, during the group discussion on the question whether the Iranian education system equips students with the core values and key competences that they need, most of the participants selected 'hard to say' as the answer. Therefore, there is a need to address these challenges by gathering more evidence or undertaking research.

5. Evaluation

At the end of the workshop, all participants were requested to give their feedback on the organisation of the workshop in an evaluation form covering topics such as new ideas obtained, the relevance of different themes, impressions on methodologies and logistics, and ideas for following up on the workshop. Twenty-eight participants provided written feedback in the evaluation form.

Regarding new ideas obtained, the participants listed the following key points:

- Awareness of the role of lifelong learning in promoting socio-economic development and the empowerment of citizens;
- Understanding the building blocks of a lifelong learning system;
- Relevance of the concept of lifelong learning in curriculum development,

- Realisation of the important roles of ministries in promoting lifelong learning, and self-evaluation of previous experiences and practices, and
- Inspirations drawn from innovative approaches and experiences of other countries in developing a lifelong learning system

Regarding the content of the workshop, the participants felt that the programme was well designed and that the themes were mostly 'highly relevant' or 'relevant' to developing a lifelong learning system in Iran. They felt that the workshop as a whole created a new framework for them to understand the importance of integrating the concept of lifelong learning into Iran's social, economic and educational development. Some participants felt that it would be better to examine a smaller number of themes in greater detail.

In general, the participants expressed 'satisfaction' with the methodology of workshop and rated the combination of plenary presentation, intervention and group work as 'excellent' and 'suitable'. On the other hand, some of them recommended reducing the duration of the workshop while giving more time to group work, paying more attention to the integration of theory and practices, providing the participants with reading materials prior to the workshop, adopting result-oriented approaches to stimulate innovations, reducing the dominance of higher education experts in the Scientific Committee.

Some participants offered comments on the follow-up to the workshop, with the following specific suggestions:

- To form a follow-up committee and appoint a focal point for lifelong learning in each of the participating ministries and organisations;
- To organise periodic national and regional capacity building workshops for policy makers and experts;
- To document the outputs of the workshop and inform the participants about experiences and practices in different countries;
- To establish a permanent national secretariat for promoting lifelong learning in Iran; and
- To strengthen the on-going collaboration between UNESCO and Iran's ministries and high-level authorities.

6. Follow-up strategy

Before the end of the workshop, representatives of organisers, resource persons and participants elaborated on the follow-up to the workshop and made the following suggestions and commitments.

The participants should:

- Submit a concise report on the workshop to their respective ministers or head of organisations;
- Write and publish papers on lifelong learning in journals and newspapers;
- Organise seminars and training workshops on lifelong learning for staff members of their ministries and organisations;
- Conduct needs assessment of a certain number of learners or potential learners in the relevant field of their ministries or organisations; and
- Make proposals on some action points for improving policy and practice in promoting lifelong learning in their respective ministries or organisations.

The Iranian National Commission of UNESCO and ministries and bodies related to education in Iran should:

- Explore the possibility of establishing a National Committee on Promoting Lifelong Learning in Iran;
- Establish and operationalize a virtual network for promoting lifelong learning in Iran;
- Prepare a national policy framework on lifelong learning in Iran

UNESCO (UIL and UTCO) should:

- Create an online forum to make workshop documents and presentations available;
- Collaborate with the Iranian National Commission of UNESCO and the Ministry of Education of Iran to provide technical assistance and monitor progress in developing a national lifelong learning policy framework in Iran;
- Support the research and capacity-building activities of the newly established National Lifelong Learning Center of Excellence at Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz;
- Invite one or two members of the Iranian taskforce for developing a national lifelong learning policy framework to study at UIL in 2014 through its fellowship/scholarship programmes; and
- Explore possibilities to organise a follow-up workshop in 2014 to review progress.

7. Concluding remarks

The workshop was the first of its kind organised in Iran in recent years. Thanks to the concerted efforts of the co-organisers, valuable contributions from a team of international and national resource persons, and, most importantly, the active and enthusiastic participation of all participants, the workshop achieved its planned objectives. First, workshop made a case for lifelong learning for all in the context of Iran. Second, by introducing international experiences and successful stories, the workshop generated some new ideas to develop a lifelong learning system. Third, the participants realised that they have the potential to become change agents in promoting evidence-based policymaking and research with the goal of strengthening lifelong learning for all in Iran, and they will play an important role in the proposed national committee and a task force to develop a national lifelong learning policy framework.

This four-day workshop for national stakeholders represents only an initial step in developing a dynamic lifelong learning system in Iran. From the point of view of results-based management (RBM), the successful organisation of the workshop is merely an 'output'. To turn this 'output' to a 'result', meaning to use the ideas generated and suggestions made at the workshop to improve policies and practices in promoting lifelong learning (cf. section 4. Recommendations on promoting lifelong learning for all in Iran), concrete and robust follow-up actions are needed (cf. section 6. Follow-up strategy). As the contents of workshop covered a wide range of themes, the time allocated to different sessions was not sufficient to cover the rich materials prepared for presentation and to allow thorough discussion. Future capacity development activities on specific themes would be necessary to deepen discussion.

For UNESCO (UIL and UTCO), the workshop was a good experience in understanding key issues of lifelong learning policy development in middle-income MENA countries with various development challenges, including gender equality and higher youth unemployment rate. As Iran is well on track to achieve the 2015 EFA goals and education-related MDGs, full articulation of lifelong learning for all in its education and development system will significantly contribute to building

coherent and holistic strategies beyond 2015. Building on the success of the workshop, UNESCO will continue to provide technical support to Iran in developing a national policy framework for promoting lifelong learning for all.

Annex 1: Agenda

Major objectives of the workshop:

- to articulate a sound conceptual understanding of lifelong learning and make a case for lifelong learning for all in the Islamic Republic of Iran;
- to exchange international experiences and successful case studies, and to generate innovative ideas to develop and implement a comprehensive national strategic document on lifelong learning;
- to motivate a contingent of policy-makers and researchers to promote evidence-based policy-making and research with the goal of strengthening lifelong learning for all.

Day 1

9:00 Opening ceremony and addresses

- Recitation from the Holy Quran
- National anthem of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Opening addresses:

- Dr Ali Asghar Yazdani, Vice Minister for International Affairs & Schools Abroad
- Dr M. Reza Saeidabadi, Secretary General, Iranian National Commission for UNESCO
- Ms Tarja Virtanen, Director, UNESCO Tehran Cluster Office

10:00 Introductions

- Introduction of agenda and objectives
- Introduction of participants
- Introduction of resource persons

10:30 Tea break

11:00 **Working session 1:** Analytical review of developments in the concept of lifelong learning and discussion of the importance of lifelong learning policies

- International perspectives:
 - Mr Jin Yang, Senior Programme Specialist, UIL
 - Mr Jørn Skovsgaard, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Children and Education of Denmark
- The Iranian perspective: Mr Mehdi Navid, Secretary of the High Council for Education, Ministry of Education, Iran
- Plenary discussion

12:30 Lunch

13:30 **Working session 2:** Analysis of socio-economic, political and cultural demands for quality human resources and active citizens in Iran

- International perspectives:
 - Mr Jørn Skovsgaard, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Children and Education of Denmark
 - Ms Rika Yorozu, Programme Specialist, UIL
- The Iranian perspective:
 - Prof. Yadollah Mehralizadeh, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Iran

15:00 Tea break

15:15 **Working session 2 (continued):** Group work – what are the key competences that men and women, young and old, in Iran should have?

Facilitator: Prof. Yadollah Mehralizadeh, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Iran

16:15 Reporting back on group work and feedback from resource persons

Day 2

9:00 **Working session 3:** Building blocks of a lifelong learning system and how they can be integrated

- International perspectives:
 - Mr Jin Yang, Senior Programme Specialist, UIL
 - Mr Jørn Skovsgaard, Senior adviser, Ministry of Children and Education of Denmark
- The Iranian perspective:
 - Prof. Yadollah Mehralizadeh, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz

10:30 Tea break

11:00 **Working session 4:** Inclusive learning from basic to higher education

- International perspectives on inclusive learning and on ensuring quality and relevance in formal education
 - Mr Jørn Skovsgaard, Senior adviser, Ministry of Children and Education of Denmark
 - Mr Jin Yang, Senior Programme Specialist, UIL
- The Iranian perspective:
 - Professor Jafar Toufighi, Tarbiat Modares University, Iran

12:30 Lunch

13:30 **Working session 3+4 (continued):** Group work – identifying the successful practices of recent years and exploring new ideas and approaches to develop inclusive and quality formal education in Iran

Facilitators: Prof. Khodayar Abili, University of Tehran and Prof. Yadollah Mehralizadeh, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz

15:00 Tea break

15:15 Reporting back on group work and feedback from resource persons

16:00 Evaluation of **Days 1 and 2**

Day 3

9:00 **Working session 5:** Reinvigorating learning in communities and families

- International perspectives:
 - Ms Rika Yorozu, Programme Specialist, UIL
- The Iranian perspective:
 - Dr Abulfazl Saeidi, Faculty, Education Research Centre, Ministry of Education, Iran

10:30 Tea break

11:00 **Working session 6:** Group work – identifying the successful practices of recent years, and exploring new ideas and approaches to reinvigorate learning in communities and families in Iran

Facilitators: Dr Abulfazl Saeidi, Faculty, Education Research Centre, Ministry of Education, Iran and Prof. Yadollah Mehralizadeh, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz

12:00 Reporting back on group work and feedback from resource persons

12:30 Lunch

13:30 **Working session 7:** Effective learning for and in the work place

- International perspectives:

- Mr Jin Yang, Senior Programme Specialist, UIL
- The Iranian perspective:
 - Dr Masoud Shafiee, Amirkabir University of Technology, Iran

15:00 Tea break

15:45 **Working session 8:** Group work – identifying the successful practices of recent years, and exploring new ideas and approaches to develop effective learning for and in the work place in Iran

Facilitators: Dr Masoud Shafiee, Amirkabir University, Iran and Prof. Yadollah Mehralizadeh, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz

16:45 Reporting back on group work and feedback from resource persons

Day 4

9:00 **Working session 9:** Extended use of modern learning technologies

- International perspectives:
 - Ms Rika Yorozu, Programme Specialist, UIL
- The Iranian perspective:
 - Dr Ali Akbar Jalali, Professor, Iran University of Science and Technology
- Plenary discussion

10:30 Tea break

11:00 **Working session 10:** Recognition of outcomes of all forms of learning

- International perspectives:
 - Mr Jin Yang, Senior Programme Specialist, UIL
- The Iranian perspective:
 - Dr Ebrahim Salehi Omran, Professor at the University of Mazandaran, Iran
- Plenary discussion

12:30 Lunch

13:30 **Working session 11:** Fundamental conditions for strengthening an integrated lifelong learning system: (1) vision, political will and commitment; (2) participation of stakeholders in governance and decision making; (3) mobilisation and innovative use of resources and potentials; (4) capacity for evidence-based decision making in lifelong learning.

- International perspectives:
 - Mr Jin Yang, Senior Programme Specialist, UIL
- The Iranian perspective:
 - Members of the Scientific Committee for the workshop and local resource persons

15:00 Tea break

15:15 **Working session 11 (continued):** Group work – identifying the successful practices of recent years and discussing innovative mechanisms to be adopted for strengthening an integrated lifelong learning system in Iran

Facilitators: Members of the Scientific Committee for the workshop and local resource persons

16:15 Reporting back on group work and feedback from resource persons

16:45 **Closing of workshop:** evaluation; presenting certificates to the participants; and commending the efforts of the local resource persons and the international experts.

Annex 2: List of participants

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