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Educational, Scientific and
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# Literacy as a Foundation for Lifelong Learning

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# Outline

1) Global concern for literacy: the challenge

2) Conceptual evolution: literacy in the 21st century

3) Global commitment: literacy for ALL

4) Positioning literacy within the perspective of lifelong learning: some trends and policy implications

# 1. Global concern for literacy: the challenge

- **Some progress:** 1985-2007 increase of adult literacy rate by **10%** to its current level of **84%**

- **But:** in terms of **numbers** there has been very little improvement in 50 years
  - 1957: **700 million** adults
  - 2008: **796 million** adults

- **In addition:** some 72 mio. children had either left school early or had never attended school in 2007

# Global View of Literacy Rates



Figure 1. What proportion of adults can read and write?
A global view of adult literacy rates, 2008

Adult literacy rate
- less than 50%
- 50% to 64%
- 65% to 79%
- 80% to 89%
- 90% to 100%
- no data
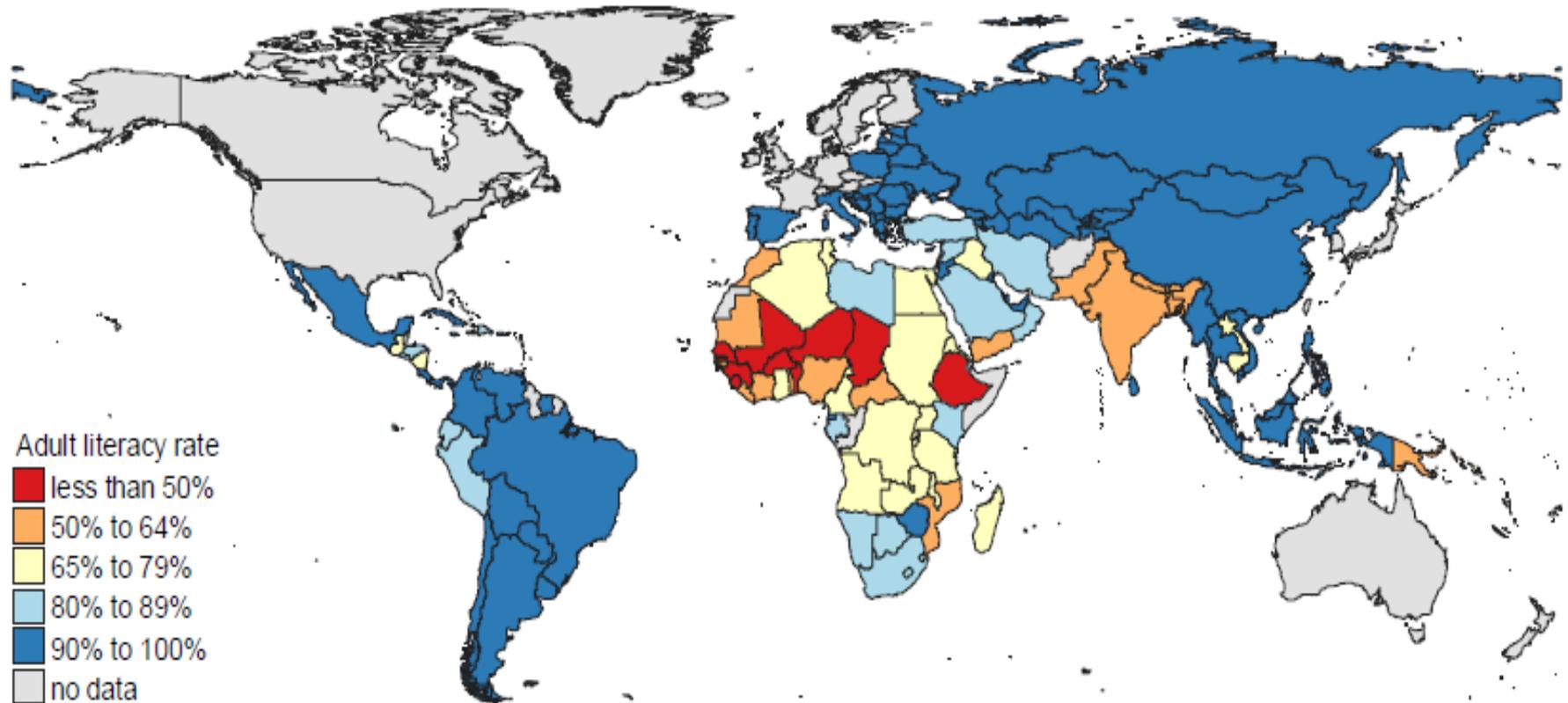
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Data Centre, stats.uis.unesco.org

# BUT: these are only estimates!!!

➢**Direct measurement** of literacy skills would significantly increase the number of youth and adults with difficulties to read and write

➢Comparative large-scale studies (IALS, ALL, PISA) and surveys conducted in many countries have raised concerns: **a considerable portion of their adult population perform only at the lowest skills level.**

# 2. Conceptual evolution: literacy in the 21st century

- Definitions of literacy have evolved over time and there is still **no universal consensus**

- The idea of „**functional literacy**" has gradually faded away (too instrumental, too many different interpretations)

- UNESCO presented the notion of a „**plurality of literacy**":
  - social dimensions of acquiring and applying literacy
  - diverse social practices embedded in concrete contexts
  - relevance of creating literate environments

# UNESCO proposes the following operational definition of literacy:

"Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy **involves a continuum of learning** in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential, and participate fully in community and wider society" (UNESCO 2005).

# Literacy involves a continuum of learning

➢ The development of reading, writing and numeracy skills involves a **continuous process** of sustained practising and application

➢ No **magic lines to cross** from illiteracy to literacy

➢ Progression **from** ability to perform most **simple** tasks **towards** higher-level, more demanding and **complex** tasks

➢ No guarantee that people may not **lose** the skills level already acquired

➢ **Evolving demands** require the acquisition of new skills, or the development of a higher level of proficiency of existing ones

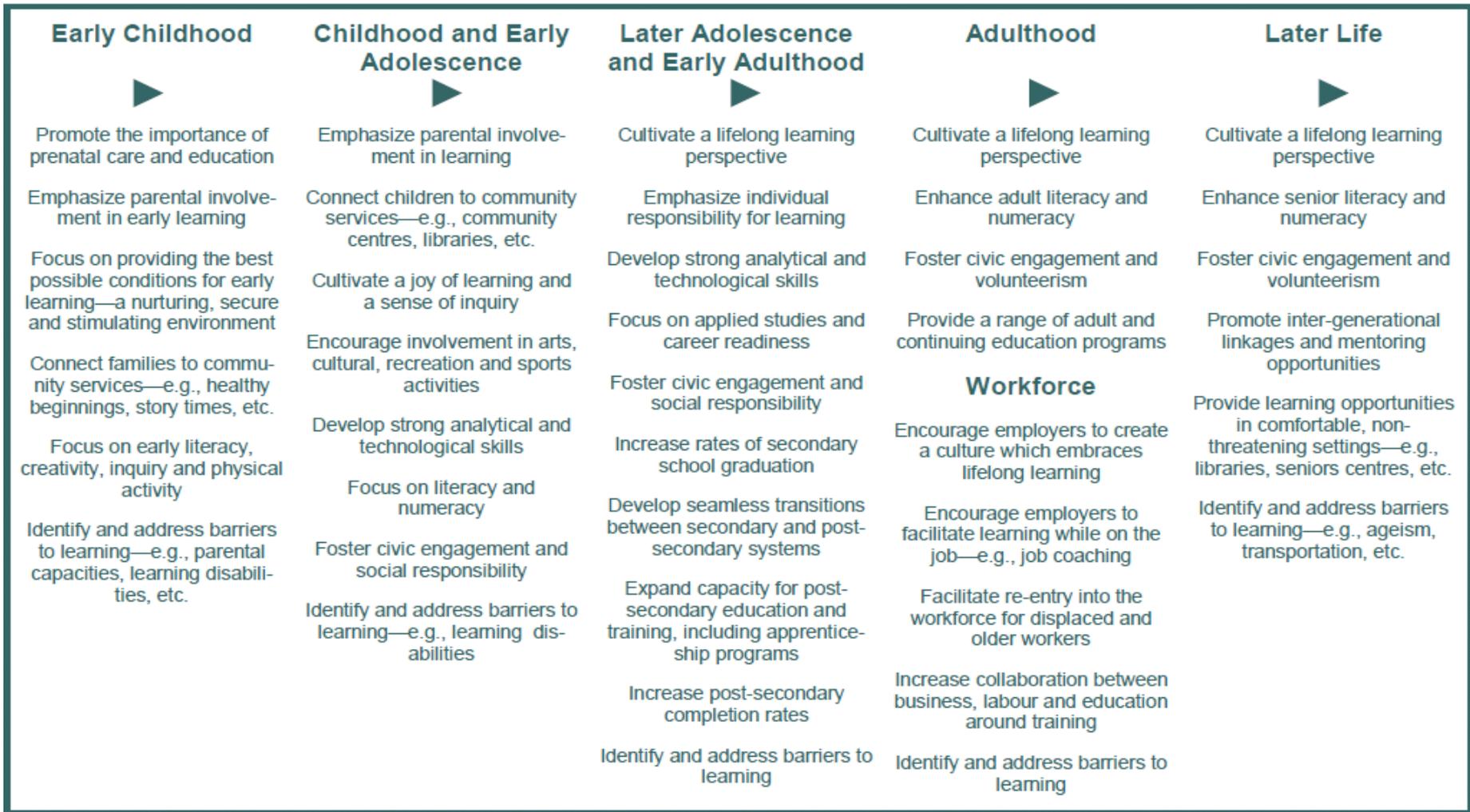# Literacy involves a <span style="color:red">continuum</span> of learning (cont.)

The acquisition and development of literacy is an **ageless** and **continuous** activity:

– before, during and after primary education

– in and out of school

– through formal, non-formal and informal learning

**a life-wide and lifelong learning process**

# Vancouver Learning City — Lifelong Learning Framework

| Early Childhood | Childhood and Early Adolescence | Later Adolescence and Early Adulthood | Adulthood | Later Life |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ |
| Promote the importance of prenatal care and education | Emphasize parental involvement in learning | Cultivate a lifelong learning perspective | Cultivate a lifelong learning perspective | Cultivate a lifelong learning perspective |
| Emphasize parental involvement in early learning | Connect children to community services—e.g., community centres, libraries, etc. | Emphasize individual responsibility for learning | Enhance adult literacy and numeracy | Enhance senior literacy and numeracy |
| Focus on providing the best possible conditions for early learning—a nurturing, secure and stimulating environment | Cultivate a joy of learning and a sense of inquiry | Develop strong analytical and technological skills | Foster civic engagement and volunteerism | Foster civic engagement and volunteerism |
| Connect families to community services—e.g., healthy beginnings, story times, etc. | Encourage involvement in arts, cultural, recreation and sports activities | Focus on applied studies and career readiness | Provide a range of adult and continuing education programs | Promote inter-generational linkages and mentoring opportunities |
| Focus on early literacy, creativity, inquiry and physical activity | Develop strong analytical and technological skills | Foster civic engagement and social responsibility | **Workforce** | Provide learning opportunities in comfortable, non-threatening settings—e.g., libraries, seniors centres, etc. |
| Identify and address barriers to learning—e.g., parental capacities, learning disabilities, etc. | Focus on literacy and numeracy | Increase rates of secondary school graduation | Encourage employers to create a culture which embraces lifelong learning | Identify and address barriers to learning—e.g., ageism, transportation, etc. |
| | Foster civic engagement and social responsibility | Develop seamless transitions between secondary and post-secondary systems | Encourage employers to facilitate learning while on the job—e.g., job coaching | |
| | Identify and address barriers to learning—e.g., learning disabilities | Expand capacity for post-secondary education and training, including apprenticeship programs | Facilitate re-entry into the workforce for displaced and older workers | |
| | | Increase post-secondary completion rates | Increase collaboration between business, labour and education around training | |
| | | Identify and address barriers to learning | Identify and address barriers to learning | |

Source: Lifelong Learning Strategy for the City of Vancouver, page 9

# Some countries have already established a scale with a continuum of different levels

- Some have tended to set policy goals by applying a **step-wise approach** to their literacy challenge:

  – They either aim to upgrade groups at the lowest level...

  – or attempt to bring everybody to a minimum level (e.g. Level 2 in the UK)

  The required „**minimum level** and **set of skills**" to be mastered by everyone is likely to **change over time**.

| LEVELS OF DEMAND within the National Qualifications Framework of the UK | | | Key skills level 5 | National qualifications framework level 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Key skills level 4 | National qualifications framework level 4 |
| | | | Key skills level 3 | National qualifications framework level 3 |
| | | Literacy/ Numeracy level 2 | Key skills level 2 | National qualifications framework level 2 |
| National curriculum level 5 | | Literacy/ Numeracy level 1 | Key skills level 1 | National qualifications framework level 1 |
| National curriculum level 4 | | | | |
| National curriculum level 3 | | Literacy/ Numeracy entry 3 | | Entry level |
| National curriculum level 2 | | Literacy/ Numeracy entry 2 | | |
| National curriculum level 1 | | Literacy/ Numeracy entry 1 | | |

# Literacy, language & numeracy as part of a wider concept of key competencies, human resource development and lifelong learning

- Literacy can **no longer** be perceived and dealt with as **a stand-alone skill** whose development is completed within a short time and is then over and done with

- Most of the **increasingly complex tasks and situations** involve literacy, which is in turn continuously shaped by evolving culture, economy, technology and learning society

- Literacy is part of a set of **foundational** skills or basic competencies that constitute the **core of basic education**

# 3) Global commitment: literacy for ALL

- Literacy is a **fundamental human right** and instrumental for the pursuit of other rights
- It constitutes a springboard for achieving **EFA** and the **MDGs** („empowerment of the poor")
- United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD, 2003-2012)
- UNESCO's Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE, 2006-2015)

# Belém Framework for Action

- The overall commitment is to "redouble efforts to reduce illiteracy by 50 per cent from 2000 levels by 2015 (…), with the ultimate goal of preventing and breaking the cycle of low literacy and creating a fully literate world".

- And ... to ensuring that all interventions recognize literacy as a continuum...

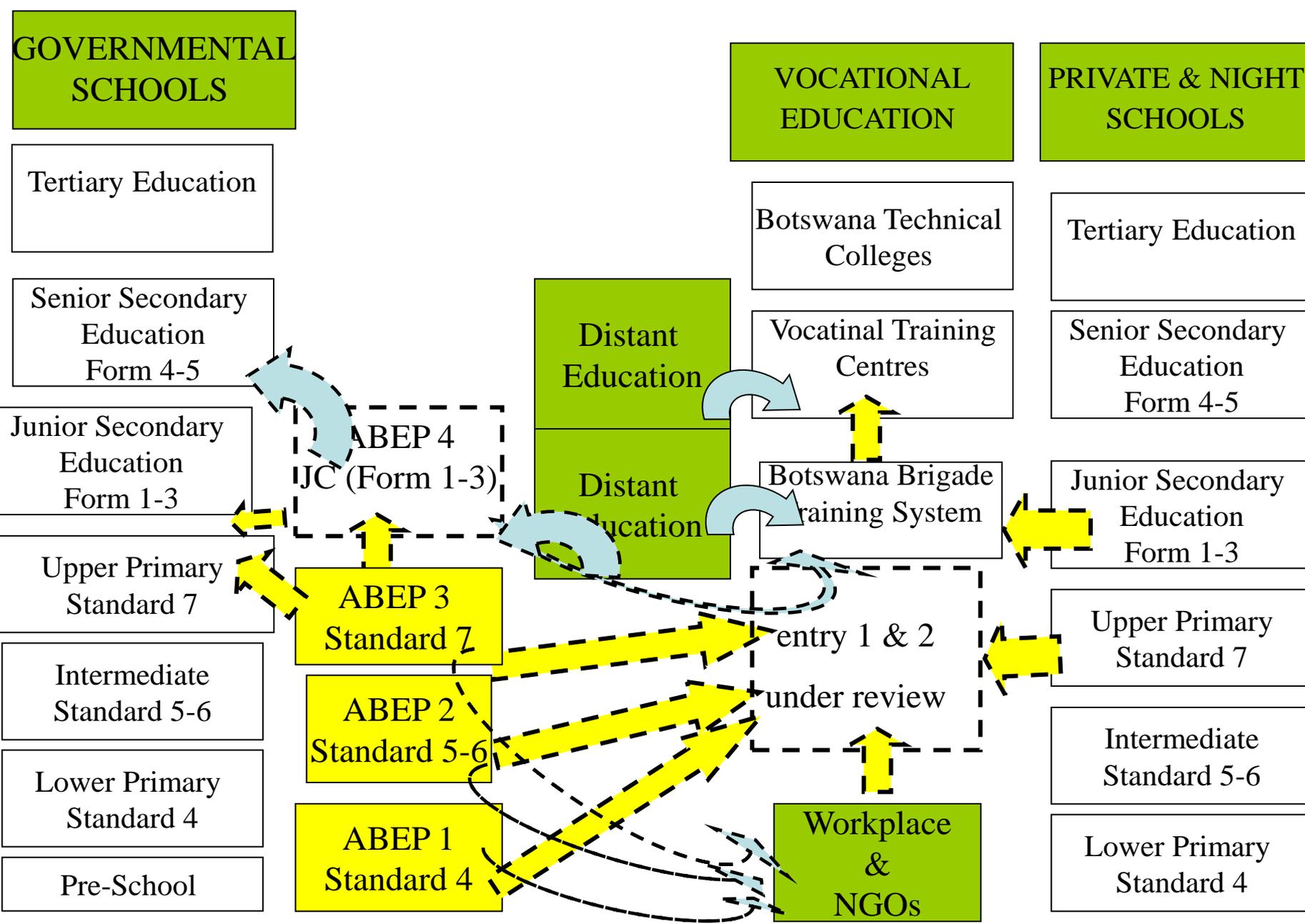# 4. Positioning literacy within the perspective of lifelong learning: some challenges and trends

- A **common understanding** of what literacy is can be difficult to achieve owing to the diversity of contexts, complex societal challenges, and the increasingly important role of ICT in peoples' lives, among other factors.

- **Weak learning outcomes** among schoolchildren as a result of **poor-quality** education is an increasing cause of concern. Many (early) school-leavers merely add to the existing pool of low literates and numerates.

- Literacy and numeracy learning is increasingly **embedded in other activities** linked to vocational training, income-generating activities, and **development activities** in a broader sense.

# Some challenges and trends (cont.)

- The need to reach **large numbers** of illiterate youth and adults in an environment of **limited resources** sometimes creates a tension on **quality** issues and puts at risk the **sustainability** of related interventions.

- Provision is becoming ever more **diversified, decentralised, flexible** and **personalised** in the effort to meet learners' needs.

- **Synergies between formal and non-formal** education, such as inter-generational approaches to learning, multi-profile teachers, resource sharing, etc. are increasingly important.

- The **professionalisation** and **accreditation** of literacy providers and teachers within **equivalency schemes** or **national qualification frameworks** ('institutionalisation' of literacy learning within national education systems).

# ENTRY AND EXIT POINTS FOR ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME

CONTINUEING EDUCATION BASIC EDUCATION

**GOVERNMENTAL SCHOOLS**

Tertiary Education

Senior Secondary Education Form 4-5

Junior Secondary Education Form 1-3

Upper Primary Standard 7

Intermediate Standard 5-6

Lower Primary Standard 4

Pre-School

ABEP 4 JC (Form 1-3)

ABEP 3 Standard 7

ABEP 2 Standard 5-6

ABEP 1 Standard 4

Distant Education

Distant Education

entry 1 & 2

under review

**VOCATIONAL EDUCATION**

Botswana Technical Colleges

Vocatinal Training Centres

Botswana Brigade Training System

**Workplace & NGOs**

**PRIVATE & NIGHT SCHOOLS**

Tertiary Education

Senior Secondary Education Form 4-5

Junior Secondary Education Form 1-3

Upper Primary Standard 7

Intermediate Standard 5-6

Lower Primary Standard 4

# Some sucess factors for achieving literacy for all:

- **Political commitment** at the highest level
- Clear government **policies, strategies and plans**
- A recognition of the need to build effective and sustainable **partnerships**
- Community involvement and **ownership**
- Building **literate environments** and **societies**
- The **integration** and **articulation** of literacy and continuing learning opportunities for youth and adults into national education and qualification **systems** (recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formally or informally acquired skills)
- Sustained **investment** in youth and adult literacy

# Literacy for all requires working simultaneously on at least five complementary fronts:

1. Laying **strong foundations** for later learning and addressing disadvantage through good-quality **early childhood** care and education programmes.

2. **Universal good-quality basic education** for all **children** (in formal or non-formal settings).

3. Scaling up and reaching out with **relevant** literacy provision to all **young people** and **adults**.

4. Developing **literacy-rich environments** and a **literate culture** at local and national level.

5. Dealing with the **root causes of illiteracy** (mainly mainly poverty, societal injustice and all kind of disadvantages) in a deep **structural** manner.

# Conclusion: Literacy within the perspective of lifelong learning

- Literacy should be seen as **part of a wider concept** of key competencies and as a **continuous process** that requires sustained learning and application.

- Literacy, as a human right, lies at the heart of **basic education** and is the **foundation for further learning opportunities**.