



Report of the International Conference on:

**“ACHIEVING LITERACY FOR ALL: EFFECTIVE
INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO SCALE UP LITERACY, REDUCE
GENDER DISPARITIES AND CREATE A LITERATE WORLD”**

ORGANISED BY
NATIONAL LITERACY MISSION AUTHORITY, INDIA
JOINTLY WITH
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SUMMARY

Literacy, the foundation of all education and lifelong learning, is an essential component of the right to education. However, according to the latest EFA Global Monitoring Report – 2012, adult literacy remains an elusive goal. The world will miss the target of halving adult illiteracy between 2000 and 2015. While the number of illiterate persons has fallen over the past decade, 775 million adults of which 64% are women, still lack basic reading and writing skills and out of world's total illiterates 37% live in India. The gender inequality in adult literacy is major barrier to many efforts to advance human development and reduce poverty in many parts of the world.

To address the magnitude and challenges of adult illiteracy, the National Literacy Mission Authority (NLMA, India) in cooperation with UNESCO Headquarters (HQs, Paris), UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL, Hamburg) and UNESCO Cluster Office in New Delhi (NDL) organised the International Conference titled "Achieving Literacy for All: Effective, innovative approaches to scale up literacy, reduce gender disparities and create a literate world" in New Delhi, India.

The International Conference provided a platform for the E-9 and SAARC countries government, and NGO representatives, international experts and resource persons, researchers and literacy and gender specialists from UNESCO (UIL, HQs, and NDL) and India, an opportunity to explore and discuss issues related to "Achieving Literacy for All". The distinguished delegates from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Nepal, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and Timor Leste participated in the Conference and shared their experiences and success stories.

The chief guests at the inaugural and the concluding sessions highlighted the importance of accomplishment of EFA Goal 4 by 2015 and emphasised the urgent need to place literacy high on the agenda. They reminded the participants that literacy is still an unfinished agenda in the light of size of illiterate population and gender disparities. The plenary sessions provided opportunities to the experts and the representatives from fifteen countries and organisations to share their experiences. Subsequently, there were panel discussions. There were two group discussions on future strategies to achieve literacy for all and on dissemination of the lessons learnt from successful approaches.

After three days of deliberations and sharing of information on effective and innovative practices, the participants appreciated the lessons drawn from successful approaches

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and effective practices in youth and adult literacy with specific focus was on gender equality issues. All the participants and the experts agreed that the first step should be to build a consensus on the **definition of literacy** as a concept. Secondly significance of the government's political will and commitment to achieve success was emphasised. A need was felt for **Policy and a robust institutional framework** in which the governments must provide leadership for literacy advancement for equal access to opportunities. It was agreed that high level of **political commitment** and **higher financial allocations** for adult education were required. It was also suggested to build *systematic, instructional and assessment* innovation to move the field forward by creating an institutional base for literacy and lifelong learning at various levels. Thirdly, suggestions were made to the effect that clear focus has to be on the women to reduce gender disparities and to focus on their literacy for empowerment. In order to reach out to women exclusively a **gender -specific literacy programmewith** curriculum development on holistic approach to women's literacy advancement was suggested. The fourth issue was to make **literacy programmes more inclusive**. It was agreed that there was a need for a detailed mapping of excluded groups. Finally, it was felt to periodically disseminate best practices from countries which have successfully managed the literacy programme, through **advocacy, networking and communication**.

The other key messages which emerged were: to take **lessons from successful approaches** which included need to develop policies and strategies to empower women, their families and communities by listening to women and their stories; need to integrate literacy with life skills; to change the mindset of men by involving them in the process of intervention through local government; using literacy as an effective approach to eradicate social evils, advocate the importance of collective groups for women empowerment and mobilise women self help groups and activists; organize women to sustain empowerment through self help groups, forest users groups, labour groups, etc; to convince men and women family members as well as community members to send women to literacy classes; to design teaching learning which is attractive and motivational to women; to use literacy as a medium to motivate toward literacy learning, e.g. child health, hygiene and nutrition, etc.; need of strong policy to close the gaps between urban and rural learners; equivalency- link with formal education; bridges to enter and exit from non-formal education as a system (i.e. horizontal move from one system to another); integration of ICT and research to generate knowledge for upscaling; linking literacy with human rights by having context specific strategies and improve services that women use.

The **priorities and key strategies** suggested for the post 2015 Agenda was the need for *recognising literacy as an indispensable foundation of lifelong learning* for reducing Gender bias and for *promoting South-South cooperation to strengthen commitment and mutual support to literacy*.

Some of the follow-up plans by countries such as Brazil are to organize a structured exchange with India considering the similarities of their national strategies. They are also looking at some kind of publication including good practices from a multicultural perspective which could be useful. The delegation from Bhutan emphasised on advocacy and institutional building. They also propose to organize a National Literacy Conference in Bhutan inviting regional experts and representatives and would like to take literacy beyond basic functional literacy (inspired from India's 'Jan Shikshan Sansthan').

BACKGROUND

In today's knowledge driven societies lack of literacy is more than ever synonymous with exclusion and marginalisation. Literacy rates have steadily increased but there is still a big gap between literacy rates for men and women. According to the estimates of 2012, there were 775 million adult illiterates and within that 64 percent are women who still lack basic reading and writing skills in this knowledge society.

In 2006, UNESCO launched the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), within the framework of United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD, 2003-2012) as one of UNESCO's three flagship initiatives dedicated to advancing the Education for All (EFA) agenda. One of the nine strategies proposed in the global LIFE Mid-Term Evaluation Report 2006-2011 has brought a clear focus on women to reduce gender disparities. The report also proposed that: *UNESCO should support research on successful approaches to reducing gender disparities in adult literacy and the empowerment of women and promote the use of research evidence in the improvement of literacy provision. (UIL 2012: page 77).*

Similar call for concrete literacy action emanated from other events, most notably, during the International Round Table on Literacy held at Paris on 6-7 September 2012, wherein nearly 200 participants from 42 countries that together have 85 per cent of the world's illiterate population unreservedly undertook to redouble their efforts to achieve universal literacy. The Sixth Meeting of UNESCO's Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education for All (EFA) (24-26 October 2012) also underscored the need for significant new investments as well as a broader conception that recognizes literacy as a continuum and the Global EFA Meeting (21-23 November 2012) called upon education partners to redouble efforts and increase the sharing of best practices to ensure progress, especially for women and committed to national efforts to translate the Paris Communiqué on Scaling up Literacy.

CONFINTEA VI (Belem, Brazil, December 2009) has marked an important milestone by stressing the importance of literacy as an indispensable foundation for independent learning at all stages of the learning continuum and by adopting a commitment to (1)

focus literacy actions on women and highly disadvantaged populations, (2) improve access to, and participation in, the full range of adult learning and education programmes for women, taking account of the particular demands of the gender specific life-course and (3) regularly collecting and analysing data and information on participation and progression in adult education programmes, disaggregated by gender and other factors.

The National Progress reports submitted in 2012 in preparation for the Second Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE 2) indicate that more women are participating in adult literacy and adult education programmes in 8 countries while more men are participating in 3 countries in E-9 and SAARC. A number of E-9 and SAARC countries have initiated specific strategies and programmes for women's literacy that helped to remove potential barriers to access and successful completion of learning opportunities. Some countries have managed to mainstream the issue of gender equity into different dimensions of literacy programme development. A more systematic review of adult literacy and adult education policies and programmes that successfully address the existing gender disparities may benefit E-9 and SAARC, in particular the LIFE countries among them, to sharpen their "gender lens" in the improvement of literacy provision.

The E-9 Initiative was launched in 1993 at the EFA Summit of the Nine High-Population Countries in New Delhi, India. Since then it has become a powerful mechanism to advance literacy in the spirit of South-South cooperation. The "E" stands for education and the "9" represents the nine highly populated countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan. Given that these countries are home not only to more than 60 percent of the world's population, but also to more than 70 percent of the world's adult illiterates.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India (GOI), convened an International Conference on "Women's Literacy for Inclusive and Sustainable Development" in New Delhi in September 2011 as a follow-up of the Eighth E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting on EFA under the theme "Literacy and Development" (Abuja, Nigeria, June 2010). The Ninth E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting (New Delhi, India, 8-10 November 2012) acknowledged "that actions must be scaled up to eradicate illiteracy in the E-9 countries, thereby making a huge impact on illiteracy globally". Following the Ninth E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting, India assumed the chair of the E-9 Initiative for the period 2012-2014. Today the India's national "Saakshar Bharat" Mission is the world's largest adult education programme.

In line with the New Delhi Commitment, the GOI as the E-9 Chair, together with UNESCO as the E-9 Secretariat, organised a technical meeting on June 27-28 2013 in New Delhi to follow up on the E-9 New Delhi Commitment. The meeting also discussed how E-9 can and should position itself in the wider EFA context, in particular the National EFA

2015 Review process and the process to define the post-2015 education and development agendas while highlighting literacy as one of the crucial element for both.

As per the latest data published by UNESCO, only 10 countries in the world are home to more than two-thirds of illiterate adults which accounts for 556 million; they are India (287m), China (52m), Pakistan (50m), Bangladesh (44m), Nigeria (42m), Ethiopia (27m), Egypt (15m), Brazil (14m), Indonesia (13m), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (12m). Against this backdrop, to make a final push towards the achievement of EFA Goal 4, by 2015 and to look at literacy challenges and opportunities beyond 2015, by learning from innovations and shared practices, International Conference on “Achieving Literacy for All – Effective, innovative approaches to scale up literacy, reduce gender disparities and create a literate world” for E-9 and SAARC countries was the need of the hour.

OBJECTIVES & METHODOLOGY

The International Conference was organised with the aim to accelerate literacy action to reach the EFA literacy goals, especially Goal 4 by 2015, by learning from innovations, addressing gender disparities, and building a shared vision of a literate world beyond 2015 with the following **objectives**:

1. to review and analyse research evidence and country reports on effective, innovative practices in adult and youth literacy, basic and continuing education in E-9, SAARC, and particularly LIFE countries among them (with a particular focus on gender equality);
2. to analyse progress, challenges and lessons learnt in achieving the EFA literacy goals, especially Goal 4 by 2015;
3. to discuss how the application of this review and evidence of successful practices can be promoted in the improvement of adult literacy as well as basic and continuing education opportunities, especially for women;
4. to reflect on how country action plans can integrate research and lessons from innovative practices with a specific focus on women and disadvantaged populations;
5. to discuss the concept, scope and role of literacy in the emerging development paradigm and in the creation of knowledge-based and inclusive societies and build a shared vision of the literacy agenda beyond 2015; &
6. to agree upon key messages and recommendations for a policy brief.

In terms of methodology, the conference was designed to be interactive and as participatory as possible. There were three plenary sessions which had the relevant themes of *innovation, sharpening of gender lens and institutional strengthening* with panel discussions built-in exclusively for the 15 countries participating to present their

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experiences. Since India's Saakshar Bharat Mission had accomplished several significant achievements in the last four years and is the world's largest adult education programme, four plenary sessions were chosen to *learn about the mission, the innovative systems and processes, on how they succeeded with empowerment, inclusive development, advocacy, environment building and mass mobilisation*. One of the sessions was devoted to presentation on the Saakshar Bharat programme as well as to present brief findings on the mid-term evaluation conducted by experts from institutions like IIMB; IIML and TISS. The programme had two group work sessions with three moderators to monitor the three groups who were asked to discuss on relevant questions based on the theme of the conference. In preparation for the group work, the delegates were requested to prepare some information and analysis on issues in advance that were addressed in the group work. With this background as the basis of discussions, two group works were undertaken during the conference to enable exchange of experience among different sectors and countries. The moderators gave valuable inputs and helped to focus the group to come out with strategies for the future. Field visit organised by NLMA in Karnal, Haryana, gave the participants the opportunity to learn from actual practices which was absolutely vital as a means of giving brief view and understanding of how the national programme functions. Two participants per country (except India), where one was a government representative and one NGO representative or researcher from each of the E-9 and SAARC countries along with resource persons and literacy and gender specialists and key stakeholders from India were invited to participate in the conference. Literacy experts from UNESCO (UIL, HQs, and NDL) Resident Coordinator of UNDP and Indian Ministers of Education all highlighted the importance of literacy and stressed how it is fundamental to the development of the society by giving their valuable inputs during the inaugural and the concluding sessions.

OVERVIEW & CONTEXT OF PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

In her opening speech the UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative of India, Ms. Lise Grande highlighted the importance of literacy and how it is so fundamental to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). She also emphasised the importance of female literacy and how it is most important for women's empowerment. The Director UNESCO New Delhi suggested the need to place literacy high on post 2015 education agenda. He pointed out that since Dakar Forum to date, the world has seen considerable improvements in adult literacy. In 2000, literacy rate was 82% and it increased up to 84% in 2011. As far as number of illiterate population is concerned, it was 782 million in 2000 and it decreased to 774 million in 2011. He reminded the participants that the world has only 900 days until the MDG and EFA deadlines and thus there is a need to encourage and accelerate our efforts to reach the literacy goal as much as possible and to halve illiteracy rate by the given time. He also suggested that we would need to place literacy fairly high in the post 2015 development agenda in order to build the "World We Want". Mr. M.M. PallamRaju, Minister of Human Resource Development, Government of India informed the august audience about the noteworthy decisions which were taken by the government such as the legally enforceable Right to Education for children in the age group of 6 to 14 that has universalised elementary education; launch of Saakshar Bharat Mission, the revamped version of the National Literacy Mission; Mid-day Meal Programme and providing an annual central budgetary support of 7 billion USD to school education and literacy. The Minister informed that the ministry is planning to restructure the entire adult education system in the country with a paradigm shift to lifelong education. Appropriate administrative, and if required legislative, process will be initiated to integrate formal, non-formal and informal learning and to formally recognise forms of education other than formal. Recognition, validation and accreditation of learning obtained through adult education will be formalised by establishing equivalency frameworks. Finally the Minister emphasised the importance of recognition of Prior Learning for not only vocational education but also for literacy and education and how it is integral to the envisaged paradigm shift to lifelong education.

The conference was organised around the three basic broad areas for literacy action. The first one - *Sharing information on innovative approaches to scale up literacy efforts before 2015* was introduced Mr. Subbarao Ilapavuluri, Chief of Literacy and Non-Formal Education, UNESCO who presented the global perspective on meeting the Dakar Goals. He cited examples of Brazil and Mexico where gender parity has been achieved and also said that there has been substantial reduction in non-literates populations in 5 countries (Brazil, China, Egypt, Indonesia & Iran) from 2000-2010. He pointed out that women's literacy is the key for countries like Nepal, Yemen, Egypt, Senegal and Central African Republic which are making progress and it is often due to substantial

improvements in literacy among the adult women. Bhutan shared their experience on how they made literacy learning accessible to the hard to reach population by aligning curriculum development with learners' changing need and by use of concept of **tapping time for lesson**. Another interesting national programme was shared by Brazil which is called **Literate Brazil** due to which the country's literacy rate is 90%. **Smart House** in Indonesia is an innovative example of institutional strengthening, as an educational house for the community that aims to create "literate, knowledgeable, prosperous and civilised society". Another very interesting example was from Maldives called the **Second Chance Programme**, an opportunity for those who could not complete school.

Second - *Reducing gender disparities in and through literacy by particularly focusing on women* was introduced by Ms. Ulrike Hanemann, UIL who presented the successful approaches towards the gender equality and the empowerment of women in and through adult literacy. She shared some of the successful stories which had helped women empowerment, communities and economies from across the world. These were: **Women only**: Literacy and Life skills in Indonesia & Sahajani Shiksha Kendra (claiming employment rights with literacy for poor women in India). **Women and family**: Family literacy in Turkey; **Women and community**: Raising voices; speaking up for participation in Nepal; Women and Literacy in post-conflict in Sierra Leone; Tostan: Community Empowerment in Senegal and 7 other African countries; **Women and health/nutrition**: Children's nutrition and literacy learning in Senegal; learning reading, writing and health in Brazil; bilingual literacy and reproductive health in Bolivia. Nigeria shared the experience of successful implementation of literacy programme through **community radio**. The programmes especially for women in Indonesia to create a literate world are the writing culture improvement through Mothers Newspaper (**Koran Ibu**), Children Newspaper (**Koran Anak**); entrepreneurship literacy; women empowerment oriented life skills learning.

The third area of importance was - *Looking at the literacy agenda after 2015 to identify key challenges and promising opportunities to advance the global vision of creating a literate world*. Mr. Arne Carlsen, Director, UIL presented the findings from the 2nd Global Report on Adult Learning and Education on rethinking literacy in the lifelong learning perspective which revealed that there is still no common understanding of how to approach literacy as a continuum and a LLL process; most countries still use traditional methods to estimate literacy rates; & absence of reliable, credible and comparable data complicated the task of assessing and analysing progress of countries in relation to EFA Goal 4. Another challenge was of implementing empowerment at grass roots level as it is not easy to develop a shared understanding. Empowerment means different things for women in different situations. It was pointed out by several countries that women are largely invisible in the decision making management and governance activities at all levels. The other challenge related to literacy teaching and learning process e.g. how to

make literacy learning attractive, motivational and relevant to women to provide progression routes beyond basic literacy and community learning towards recognised certificates and improved job opportunities. On the other hand, the challenges in **Afghanistan** are that the traditional cultural norms attach lower value to women's education & thus restrict the movement of women.

INDIA: SAAKSHAR BHARAT

One day was dedicated to learn from the experiences of the Saakshar Bharat – India's Flagship Literacy Programme. In his presentation Mr. J.S. Raju, DG, National Literacy Mission Authority shared with delegates the challenges to run world's largest literacy programme and how they have been successful in overcoming them. He talked about the magnitude of the work comparing the population of Indian states with the countries in the world. Presentations on the **successful approaches** included good governance; development of innovative banking fund flow system; fund & accounts management system; & web based planning and management information system. It was explained as to how ICT was being used extensively for planning, banking, fund release and monitoring. Efforts being made by the mission in creating a positive predisposition among potential beneficiaries through mass media and advocacy were also explained. It was pointed out that the root cause of **challenge** was the credibility deficit and to make it people's movement. The suggested **solutions were** to improve the product through complete process of re-engineering by: making literacy a learning continuum; provide equitable access and quality; institutionalisation & decentralisation; good governance; scientific learner assessment; monitoring & evaluation and the need for forming community structure at grass root level. To give international delegates the opportunity to learn from actual practices and talk to learners and their facilitators, one day field visit to adult learning centres and literacy programmes in Karnal, Haryana was organised. Mr. Raju shared the **vision** to make "adult education as an independent alternate approach to education of all adults, literate as well as non-literate, supported by a legislative framework". The vision for the mission is to redefine literacy and adult education; strategic shift from functional literacy to LLL; institutionalisation, professionalization and sustainability of functional literacy programmes and provide access, quality & equity.

CONCLUSIONS

After three days of deliberations, all were in agreement that the idea of a literate world is of exceptional import to development, to equality, and to justice. It is the way in which a world free of deprivation and inequality will be build and enable all sections of society to fully partake of the opportunities to emerge from a rapidly globalizing, increasingly

prosperous world. Each country participating had a chance to present and share their experiences and suggest ways on how to accelerate literacy action. They were led by the moderators who succinctly summarised the sessions, followed by reflections in the last session which are summarised as follows:

All participants and experts agreed that the first step was to build a consensus on the **definition of literacy** as a concept. UIL suggested taking the initiative to clarify with UNESCO colleagues and Member States the concept of literacy, and of LLL. It was felt that there was urgent need to go further beyond the traditional dichotomy of “literate-illiterate” and to recognise literacy as a continuum of learning. Once this is in place the collection of data on literacy-illiteracy should be improved by using national population censuses and household surveys to include questions that require adults to self-support on which literacy competences they have and provide in this way for a more nuanced view of literacy levels. It was also recommended that in today’s time countries should also measure the skills of their young and adult population.

It was suggested and endorsed by all the delegates that the focus on political leadership and commitment is very essential as was done in China. It was felt that there was need of very strong political will which should be translated into funding and financing. Government’s political will and commitment must be in place for success, thus a need for **policy institutional framework** in which the governments must provide leadership for literacy advancement for equal access to opportunities – social, economic and political, etc. In order to carry on with a vision of a literate world beyond 2015, the need was felt to build a global coalition of committed and innovative actors to transform the world’s literacy landscape to make planet inclusive, literate and peaceful. It was also suggested to build *systematic, instructional and assessment* innovation to move the field forward by creating an institutional base for literacy and lifelong learning at various levels (e.g. Korean National Institute of Lifelong Learning, India’s NLMA). The delegates wanted to know how to ensure financing of the literacy and adult education more sustainable and respectable. It was agreed that one requires high level of **political commitment** underpinned by **higher financial allocations** for adult education (e.g. of Brazil’s medium term programme with dependable funding and credible monitoring of learning outcomes).

Reducing gender disparities, was one of the three main broad areas which attracted a lot of discussion resulting in, a clear focus on women to reduce gender disparities and to focus on their literacy for empowerment. It was argued that **empowerment** is enabled through gradual steps, along a continuum, within the context in which women feel familiar & self confident. Thus need to promote, nurture and build institutions which will sustain literacy work within the framework of LLL, with a significant focus on women and disadvantaged groups. This will help create a literate environment by encouraging local book production, promotion of reading and creation of digital

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libraries. It was also felt to lay emphasis on income generating activities for women in literacy classes and to create awareness about legal entitlements. In order to reach out to women exclusively it was felt to have a **gender specific literacy programme** with curriculum development on holistic approach to women's literacy advancement. Suggestions were made to enact laws that will prohibit all forms of discrimination against women and the agreement was that the gender discrimination should be effectively addressed wherever it prevails through prosecutions and enforcements.

One of the key pertinent issues raised by delegates was how to ensure inclusiveness? Thus, to make **literacy programmes more inclusive** it was agreed that there was need for a detailed mapping of excluded groups. Social surveys should be carried out for mapping of disadvantaged groups in rural areas such as women's needs and other issues that affect them and possible solutions. Database needs to be created which should cover wide range of areas like people's dwelling places, language, food habits, quality of life they lead etc. It was also suggested that the database created should be used to establish or modify existing literacy programmes into an integrated and innovative approach to literacy advancement and literacy development. Thus, there should be a comprehensive initiative to identify and enumerate excluded groups, need assessment should be done and there should be included in the planning process right from the beginning.

On discussion and analysis on what worked and what did not work it was felt necessary to take **lessons from successful approaches** adopted in different countries for scaling up literacy, especially for women. Afghanistan showed marked improvement over the five year (2006-11) due to increased provision of literacy classes. There was need to integrate literacy with like skills as in the case of Bangladesh where the post literacy programme was linking neo-literates to the job market. Indonesia presented several examples especially for women to create a literate world like writing culture, children newspaper, entrepreneurship literacy and women's education for sustainable development. It was agreed that there was a need to change the mind set of men by involving them in the process of intervention through local government. It was also suggested that literacy should be used as an effective approach to eradicate social evils in the society. The other successful approaches were advocacy of the importance of collective groups for women's empowerment and mobilization of women's selfhelp groups.

The delegates discussed and felt the need for paradigm shift to lifelong learning in order to emphasize the importance of literacy and education. The **strategies for lifelong learning** were suggested in order to bring structural changes in education system, e.g. administrative framework, prioritizing of adult literacy and need of strong policy. Drawing from examples presented by the countries it was suggested to use successful nonconventional methods such as mobile library and resource centers at work site. It

was also felt to bridge equivalency link with the formal education so that one could enter and exit from non-formal education system (i.e. horizontal move from one system to another).

In order to periodically learn from best practices it was suggested that there was need for **advocacy, networking and communication** on a regular basis. It was agreed that there was a need to connect the world with successful examples on multi-sectoral approach, multimodal approach, multi-thematic contents and with multi-stakeholders. The delegates wanted to know as to how to make advocacy efforts more effective, widen their outreach and ensure continuity. It was recommended that UNESCO/UIIL Newsletters specific for best practices and interactions should be circulated among Member States by UNESCO offices across the globe. It was also felt that each member country be advised to have their own newsletters. Emphasis was also on use of technology and recommendations were made for a website to be established by UNESCO/UIIL for interactions, communications and sharing on the issue of need to find ways to incorporate new technologies and integrate ICTs for programme development. UIL suggested a bi-annual meeting for E-9 on literacy, to share good practices and to take stock.

Some delegates felt that countries with large populations and areas of coverage face the tension between centralized planning and coordination of institutional resources, and decentralized convergence in the process of implementation. Effective institutional mechanisms at an intermediate level thus need to be found through the involvement of government extension machinery in collaboration with civil society organizations

KEY MESSAGES

The key consensus messages emerging from the international conference focused on the broad areas of literacy action. These included (i) *recognising literacy as a graded, levelled continuum and an indispensable foundation of lifelong learning* (as the paradigm shift to lifelong learning will develop processes to initiate and integrate formal, non-formal, and informal learning and to formally recognise all forms of education which will more resolutely address literacy and focus on the big push to 2015 as the foundation in the education goal); (ii) *use of innovative and effective practice to reduce gender disparities and accelerate literacy efforts* (need to link literacy with life skills and competencies for development); (iii) *institutionalized long-term responses to meet learning needs of a diversity of target groups, including RPL, equivalency schemes and alternative pathways to create literate and learning societies* (create institutional set-up and strengthen efforts for linking of literacy with skill development - provide opportunities for progression within lifelong learning systems. Ensure incremental,

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small-step progression routes are in place, within the curriculum, to stretch women's learning and skill development; include opportunities for the recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge, skills and competencies; leverage partnerships to identify potential opportunities for paid work as well as further learning and support women with training to take up such opportunities & develop policies, within frameworks of lifelong learning, which are funded and provide long-term strategies and sustainability); and (iv) *partnerships and South-South cooperation to strengthen commitment, to learn from each other and mutual support* (as the region as a whole has among the lowest literacy rates in the world, this is an issue that is national, regional and global and the solutions must therefore come from cooperation, engagement and sense of global ownership of EFA goals, and the MDGs).

EVALUATION

"It was without doubt an important learning and human experience".

"One of a very good international conference I participated. Not felt boring as there was new thing to listen every time".

"South Asian collaboration is needed to accelerate whole process; special effort is needed to strengthen collaboration among India, Pakistan and Bangladesh".

"The conference was very enriching and interactive. More than that the representatives could now go ahead at individual/national level to interact each other on literacy mission. We are keeping good touch with each other - discussing and sharing on the country's issues and many times help to solve. I think this conference has promoted Institutional building of the each representative or stakeholders".

The participant's feedback demonstrated that the conference was a success and was able to deliver the expectations of literacy experts who had come from far off places to share their experiences and to find solution to *achieve literacy for all through effective innovative approaches*. On analysing the feedback forms one can see how the participants have started personal follow-ups with colleagues whom they met during the conference. The feedback forms also highlight various aspects from the Saakshar Bharat initiative which the participating countries found very useful and have listed several initiatives which they would like to implement in their own country. The field visit prior to the conference has been appreciated by all international participants as it not only gave them an opportunity to see the actual working of literacy on the ground but helped in networking amongst each other and to get along better. So when they formally came to attend the conference, it proved very positive to be in a known,

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friendly environment and helped in more interaction and sharing of ideas. Some found the time allotment for country presentation was short considering how important the issue was in terms of looking at *literacy agenda post 2015*. Some others felt that there was insufficient time for discussion and group work in order to be able to digest, systematize and organize the contents of the plenary sessions. Overall they thought that the conference was well organised and very relevant and provided a great platform for exchange of information and ideas for future exchanges and cooperation between the countries present.