LITERACY FOR ALL
A UNITED NATIONS LITERACY DECADE (2003-2012)

Base document

prepared for UNESCO

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I.   BACKGROUND

The fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a Resolution (Resolution A/RES/54/122 of 17 December 1999) to consider proclaiming a United Nations Literacy Decade. The proposal came from the folowing Member Nations: Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Ecuador, India, Madagascar, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, and Trinidad and Tobago. The Resolution requested that the Secretary General of the United Nations, in co-operation with the Director General of UNESCO, submit a proposal and a plan of action for this decade to the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly in 2001.

Within this context, UNESCO's Basic Education Division convened an expert meeting to consult on the conditions for launching such world-wide literacy initiative within the framework of Education for All (EFA) and to prepare a preliminary proposal. The meeting (held in Sèvres, France, on 27-29 March 2000) was attended by a small group of well-known specialists from around the world[2].

The World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April, 2000) was seen as a key opportunity for a first round of feedback on the document and consultation on the overall project of a UN Literacy Decade. Thus, a special strategy session entitled "Literacy for All: A Renewed Vision for a Ten-year Action Plan" was organised within the Forum by UNESCO Basic Education Division, the UNESCO Institute of Education (UIE), the International Literacy Institute (ILI), ISESCO, Action Aid, and SIDA.[3]

The session attracted about 100 people coming from all regions and from very diverse sectors and institutions: government, NGOs, academic and research institutions, religious, ethnic and grassroot organizations, and international co-operation agencies. There was high representation from developing countries, both among the presenters and the session participants, including some of the countries that promoted the Resolution. Participants supported the idea of a UN Literacy Decade and provided

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[1] This document was drafted in 2000 by Rosa-María Torres in the framework of a work contract and process with UNESCO's Basic Education Division in Paris.

[2] The group comprised: Chander J. Daswani (India), Agneta Lind (Sweden), Michael Omolewa (Nigeria), Adama Ouane (Mali), and Rosa-María Torres (Ecuador). The following UNESCO staff also attended the meeting: Aicha Bah-Diallo (Director, Basic Education), S.K. Chu (UNESCO Institute of Statistics), Suzanne Schnuttgen (Collective Consultation of NGOs), and Ushio Miura (Literacy and Non-formal Education Section).

[3] Organiser: A. Ouane (UIE, Hamburg). Opening of the session: A. Bah Diallo (UNESCO). Moderator: L. King (UIE, Hamburg). Presenters: R.M. Torres (Ecuador/Argentina); D. Wagner (ILI, USA), D. Archer (Action Aid, UK), M. Kere (Save the Children-USA, Burkina Faso), M. Lamarana Bah (ISESCO, Rabat) and P. Krug (Ministry of Education, Germany). Final remarks: M. Omolewa (Delegate to UNESCO, Nigeria) and C.J. Daswani (Consultant, UNESCO, India). Rapporteur: R.M. Torres. Secretary: J. Sequeira (UNESCO-Kazakhstan).

valuable comments and suggestions, particularly in connection with the plan of action.

The present document incorporates the inputs of the strategy session held in Dakar within the World Education Forum. It is meant as a base document for wide consultation and discussion among individuals and institutions involved with literacy around the world, and whose participation will be critical in the implementation and success of the UN Literacy Decade.

II.   PREAMBLE

1. Over the last few decades, the year 2000 emerged as a horizon against which mankind projected some of its most important aspirations, universal literacy one of them. However, at the turn of the century literacy for all – children, youth and adults -- is still an unaccomplished goal and an ever moving target. A combination of ambitious goals, insufficient and parallel efforts, inadequate resources and strategies, and continued underestimation of the magnitude and complexity of the task, is likely to explain this situation. Lessons learnt over these past decades show, in any case, that meeting the goal of universal literacy calls not only for more and better efforts but for renewed political will and for doing things differently at all levels: locally, nationally and internationally.

2. The "expanded vision of basic education" outlined in the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990) referred to an education that meets the basic learning needs of all, children, youth and adults, throughout life, both in and out of school. Literacy is one of the most basic learning needs of children, young people and adults, and is thus at the very heart of basic education. Literacy is an ageless concept, it is developed both in and out of school, through formal, non-formal and informal learning systems, and is a lifelong process. Literacy is not only an indispensable tool for lifelong education and learning but is also an essential requisite for citizenship and human and social development. The right of every individual to education, as recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is strongly rooted in the right to literacy.

3. Major efforts have been devoted to literacy over the last fifty years both through remedial and preventive measures. On one hand, millions of illiterate youth and adults have been served through non-formal education programmes aimed at providing them with basic literacy skills. On the other hand, the accelerated expansion of schooling made basic literacy attainable for the majority of children around the world. Numbers are impressive and speak for themselves: by 1950 half or more of the adult population was estimated to be illiterate; by 2000 the illiteracy

rate is estimated to have been reduced to 20%. Also, while there were 206 million children enrolled in primary school worldwide in 1950, that figure had grown to 681 million by 1998. In 1970 the net enrolment ratio in primary school in developing countries was 62,7%; it was estimated that by 2000 this ratio would increase to 84,8%.   In 1970, 68.8% of the school-age boys and 56,2% of school-age girls were enrolled in school; by the year 2000, it is estimated that these figures represent 87,9% and 81,5% respectively.

4. Despite tremendous and steady progress, universal literacy remains a major quantitative and qualitative challenge for both developing and industrialised countries. The challenge entails:

(a) The 875 million illiterate youth and adults and the 113 million children who are still out of school and who continue to nurture every year the world's illiteracy statistics. They are the poorest of the poor and most of them – two thirds of the adult illiterates and 60% of the out-of school children – are female. The fact that the map of illiteracy continues to overlap with the map of social, gender and ethnic inequalities, makes the struggle for literacy a struggle not only for education goals but for social justice and for human dignity and empowerment.

(b) The uncounted, but presumably large portion of the world's population -- children, youth and adults -- that is considered and considers itself "literate" but has an insufficient mastery of literacy to cope even with the most elementary tasks involving literacy. So-called *functional illiteracy*, a phenomenon that drew world attention only in recent times, affects both industrialised and developing countries. It is rooted in the poor quality of the educational provision offered in both formal and non-formal education institutions and programmes. Numerous studies and evaluations on school learning achievement conducted over the past two decades in developing and industrialised countries have brought to the surface poor learning results, particularly in the realm of literacy acquisition. Thus, while illiteracy was traditionally associated with lack of schooling, today the connection between schooling and literacy is no longer taken for granted. The battle for literacy has become an issue both outside and inside school walls.

(c) The increasing numbers of children, youth and adults who learnt how to read and write but who do not make active or meaningful use of their literacy skills. *Aliteracy* has thus emerged as a new concept and concern, not only in highly literate societies but in those that are still struggling with large illiterate and functional illiterate populations. *Aliteracy* is no doubt a reflection of some of the critical contradictions of modern times: unprecedented flow of information and knowledge together with unprecedented levels of

poverty, unemployment and struggle for survival that make leisure, studying or learning a luxury for a few; an era of haste, dominated by audiovisual culture and media, that leaves little room for interpersonal communication and expression.

(d) The expanding gap between the illiterate and neo-literate, on one hand, and the literate, on the other hand, in the context of the new possibilities for literacy development and applications opened by modern information and communication technologies. The risk for increased social and educational polarisation has become more pronounced: while a small portion of the world population gains access to the most sophisticated developments and uses of literacy, including regular use of e-mail and Internet for everyday communication, the majority of the world population continues to have access only to elementary forms and levels of literacy, or is denied such access altogether.

5. Prospects for universal literacy are not encouraging. According to the latest UNESCO estimates, and if current trends continue, by the year 2010 the adult illiterate population would represent 830 million people and the proportion may decrease only from 20% to 17% (namely one in every six adults would still be illiterate). On the other hand, meeting the basic literacy needs of children, young people and adults has become an increasingly complex endeavour, in the context of increased education levels required by modern societies as well as the more complex nature of literacy in order to deal with its more sophisticated applications, including the emergence of new information and communication technologies.

Thus the need for a renewed commitment to Literacy for All through a major new worldwide initiative that focuses on literacy not as a parallel initiative but as an integral component of basic education and of the global and renewed commitment for Education for All (EFA).

Thus the need for a renewed understanding and practice of literacy, that revitalises the two-pronged strategy – with children and with adults, in and out of school – and commits itself to renovated efforts, approaches, strategies and mechanisms.

•**Why** a United Nations literacy decade?
Because universal literacy – child and adult literacy – remain a major quantitative and challenge for both developing and industrialised countries.

•Why a United Nations **literacy** decade?
Because literacy is a fundamental human right, a basic learning need, and the key to learning to learn.

•Why a United Nations literacy **decade**?
Because knowledge and experience have shown that the battle for literacy requires intensive, focused and sustained efforts beyond one-shot programs, projects or campaigns.

•Why a **United Nations** literacy decade?
Because literacy fosters cultural identity, democratic participation and citizenship, tolerance and respect for others, social development, peace and progress.

III. LESSONS LEARNT

Research and the experience gained in the field of child and adult literacy in the past fifty years have provided the world community considerable knowledge and insights into the nature of literacy and literacy acquisition. Significant YES and NOs have been learnt regarding policy and practice in this field.

Important lessons have been learnt from past attempts from the UN system and the international community to organize global and/or regional education initiatives that have remained to a large extent donor-driven, as a result of insufficient attention paid to countries' and people's needs, decisions and responsible ownership. The vertical, mandatory, non-participatory scheme has also been the norm at the country level, between central government and sub-national authorities and communities. Addressing the gap between rhetoric and implementation, between plans and achievements, which became part of the scenario of education reform worldwide, implies a major revision of traditional policy formulation, decision-making and resource-allocation schemes at both the international and national level.

UNESCO has been at the forefront of the world literacy effort and especially concerned with keeping adult literacy high in both national, regional and international education agendas. Beginning with the report on *fundamental education* in 1947, and the emergence of the concept of *functional literacy* in the 1950s and 1960s, the Experimental World Literacy Programme was launched in 1969, as an attempt to link literacy to development. The 1960s, 1970s and ealy 1980s witnessed several well-known mass literacy campaigns throughout the world, most of them developed in revolutionary contexts, and from which UNESCO and the international community learnt important lessons particularly regarding the importance of political will and social mobilization for literacy efforts. The concept of *basic learning needs*, emerged in the 1970s, was to sow the seeds of *basic education* and its "expanded vision" envisaged in 1990 in the Declaration on Education for All (EFA) encompassing lifelong learning for children, youth and adults both in and out of school.

Over the 1990s, and under the umbrella of EFA, important efforts were made particularly regarding children and primary education. As stated by the EFA 2000 Assessment, since 1990:

- primary school enrolments increased by some 82 million children;
- developing countries as a whole achieved an average net enrolment ratio in excess of 80%;
- there was a modest improvement in gender equality in primary enrolment in many regions, with 44 million more girls in school in 1998 than in 1990;
- repetition and dropout rates declined.

However, the six Jomtien EFA goals set for the year 2000 were not achieved globally, as stated by the Global Education for All 2000 Assessment presented and discussed in April 2000, at the World Education Forum in Dakar. Here, the year 2015 was set as the new deadline for achieving Education for All, again with six major goals (see box).

In particular, the EFA 2000 Assessment acknowledges that not enough attention was given in this past decade to early childhood, youth and adult education, despite the four specific goals set in this respect in the Jomtien Declaration and Plan of Action.

As stated in the EFA 2000 Assessment, over the 1990s:

- early childhood care and education expanded modestly, and mainly in urban areas; of the more than 800 million children under six years of age, fewer than a third benefit today from any form of early childhood education;
- the overall adult literacy rate rose to 85% for men and to 74% for women, but this is far from the goal of reducing adult illiteracy rates to half of its 1990 level;
- growth in non-formal education and skills training was slow.

The concentration of efforts on primary education and the low attention given to early childhood, youth and adult education over the "Jomtien decade", has been acknowledged by all EFA partners: governments, NGOs, teacher organizations, research institutions, international aid agencies. It was already noted in the EFA mid-decade (Amman, Jordan) assessment and has been corroborated in most end-of-decade regional EFA assessments as well as in the final Global 2000 Assessment (Dakar, Senegal). The Declaration (Recife, Brazil) of the Nine Highest Population Countries (E-9 Countries) -- Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan -- acknowledged massive illiteracy in some countries as a major pending challenge and decided "according highest national

priority to EFA and in particular to the eradication of adult illiteracy".

EDUCATION FOR ALL (EFA) GOALS

Jomtien 1990- 2000	Dakar 2000-2015
1. Expansion of early childhood care and developmental activities, including family and community interventions, especially for poor, disadvantaged and disabled children.	**1.** Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
2. Universal access to, and completion of, primary education (or whatever higher level of education is considered "basic") by the year 2000.	**2.** Ensuring that by 2015 all children, with special emphasis on girls and children in difficult circumstances, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
3. Improvement in learning achievement such that an agreed percentage of an appropriate age cohort (e. g. 80% of 14 year-olds) attains or surpasses a defined level of necessary learning achievement.	**3.** Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning, life skills, and citizenship programmes.
4. Reduction of the adult illiteracy rate (the appropriate age group to be determined in each country) to, say, one-half its 1990 level by the year 2000, with sufficient emphasis on female literacy to significantly reduce the current disparity between male and female illiteracy rates.	**4.** Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
5. Expansion of provisions of basic education and training in other essential skills required by youth and adults, with programme effectiveness assessed in terms of behavioural changes and impacts on health, employment and productivity.	**5.** Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.
6. Increased acquisition by individuals and families of the knowledge, skills and values required for better living and sound and sustainable development, made available through all education channels including the mass media, other forms of modern and traditional communication, and social action, with effectiveness assessed in terms of behavioural	**6.** Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all, so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

change.	

There is general agreement that, despite Jomtien's commitment to an "expanded vision of basic education", EFA was generally interpreted to be centred around formal schooling for children. Moreover, the goal of *universal primary education* tended once again to be centred around enrolment indicators, with insufficient attention on retention, completion and, more importantly, effective learning, all of which were essential elements of Jomtien's vision and goals.

The commitment towards universal literacy has been continuously renewed and postponed at least over the last three decades. Concepts and terminologies have been renovated, different strategies and methodologies have been tested, new emphases have emerged, but the magnitude of the task has often defeated even the best intentions and efforts. Looking back, identifying and critically analysing the ingredients of success and failure, at both the national and international level, appears as the only promising way to approach the future.

The long acknowledged and emphasised need for a two-pronged approach to literacy -- linking school and out-of-school education, child and adult literacy -- has seldom been incorporated in policy design and programme implementation. In fact, child literacy and youth/adult literacy have been traditionally viewed as an either/or option, competing rather than complementing and reinforcing each other. Each has developed separately, with its own community of theoreticians and practitioners, its own institutions, policies, programmes and budgets.

Limited understandings of illiteracy and literacy, and outmoded teaching-learning approaches and methodologies, have prevailed in school as well as in out-of-school education programmes. The important advance of research and knowledge in the last few decades, particularly in the field of child literacy and school acquisition, has not yet permeated teacher training programmes and institutions, particularly in the least developed countries and zones. Paradoxically, it is in these contexts where literacy becomes the most critical challenge in need of the most advanced knowledge and the most qualified human resources.

Bilingual and multilingual contexts are the norm, rather than the exception, throughout the world, both in the North and the South. However, literacy instruction has traditionally ignored these realities, together with their pedagogical as well as social and cultural consequences. Millions of children, young people and adults around the world continue to be taught in languages they do not master and often do not understand. Difficulties are easily attributed to learners and their "learning difficulties", when in fact they are rooted in an

education system that is inadequate and has not yet developed a full understanding of learning and its requirements.

From the notion of literacy as a simple and elementary skill, we have come to recognise that literacy is a highly complex and dynamic concept, a continuum and a lifelong learning process in itself, continuously expanding its domains and applications. From the perception of illiteracy and literacy as merely quantitative figures and statistical indicators, we have advanced to admit that quality and equity are inseparable components of any literacy effort. From the notion of isolated individuals that become literate, we have come to understand that reaching universal literacy requires building literate schools, literate families, literate communities and literate societies. From the expectation of literacy as a tool for individual and social development, we have learnt that eliminating poverty and eliminating illiteracy are two sides of the same coin, that one cannot take place without the other, and that political will is the key to success in both fronts.

IV. LITERACY FOR ALL: A RENEWED VISION

Literacy for All as advocated in the present Literacy Decade Framework implies a renewed vision and a renewed commitment from all: national governments, national societies, local communities and international agencies.

Literacy for All transcends age groups, is the foundation of lifelong learning and is a key element of inter- and cross- generational learning.

Literacy for All includes *all*: children and adults, girls and boys, women and men, rural and urban, countries in the South and in the North.

Literacy for All means ensuring effective and sustainable literacy levels. This implies ensuring adequate conditions and opportunities for literacy development in the family, the community, the workplace, the school system, the media.

Literacy for All implies active policies and collective efforts not only towards literacy acquisition, but towards plural and meaningful uses of literacy as a means of expression, communication and lifelong learning.

Such renewed vision calls for renewed modalities of operations, monitoring and accountability procedures and mechanisms.

LITERACY FOR ALL: A RENEWED VISION

PAST	TODAY
Illiteracy as a social pathology (i.e. "scourge") and an individual responsibility.	Illiteracy as a structural phenomenon and a social responsibility.
Literacy as a panacea for social development and change.	Literacy in the context of broader educational and socio-economic interventions.
"Eradicate illiteracy" or "reduce the illiteracy rates" as the goal.	Create literate environments and literate societies as a goal.
Literacy education associated only with youth and adults.	Literacy education associated with children, youth and adults.
Literacy education associated with out-of-school groups and non-formal programmes.	Literacy education takes place both in and out of the school system.
Child literacy and adult literacy viewed and developed separately, in a parallel manner.	Child and adult literacy linked within a holistic policy framework and strategy.
Literacy centred around literacy provision (*teaching*).	Literacy centred around literacy *learning*.
Literacy goals centred around literacy acquisition.	Literacy goals include literacy acquisition, development and effective use.
Literacy understood as initial, basic literacy only (an elementary level).	Literacy as functional literacy (literacy, to be such, must be functional and sustainable).
Literacy viewed separately from basic education (i.e. literacy *and* basic education).	Literacy viewed as an integral part of basic education.
Literacy acquisition and development associated with a particular period in the life of a person.	Literacy understood as a lifelong learning process.
Literacy associated only with the written language (reading and writing) and print.	Literacy related to both oral and written expression and communication, within a holistic understanding of language (speaking, listening, reading and writing).
Search for THE literacy method or approach valid for all cases and circumstances.	Understanding that there is no single or universal method or approach to literacy.
Literacy acquisition in school as a goal of the first or the first two grades.	Literacy acquisition in school as a goal for the whole primary education cycle.
Literacy as a specific area in the school curriculum (Language).	Literacy across the school curriculum.
Literacy associated only with conventional tools (i.e. pencil and paper).	Literacy related to both conventional and modern tools (pencil and paper but also

	keyboard and digital technologies).
Literacy as a responsibility of the State only or of civil society alone.	Literacy as a responsibility of both the State and civil society.

V. PRINCIPLES

Several key principles must organise and orient policy decisions and implementation:

▪**Literacy is fundamental**: Literacy for all and the building of a literate society will become a real possibility only when there is a broad awareness and shared acceptance that literacy is a basic learning need of all, one of the foundations of lifelong learning and of citizenship. Beyond its instrumental value for the improvement of micro and macro economic and social indicators, literacy functions as a vehicle for both the acquisition and creation of knowledge, for newer and expanded perceptions of time and space, for freeing the mind from the narrow confines of here and now.

•**Take into account lessons learnt**: Renewed commitments and strategizing at each level -local, national, regional, global- must be based on lessons learnt both from mistakes and best practices.

▪**Demand and country-driven interventions**: The proposal for a Literacy Decade came from countries. Thus, the ownership of the initiative should remain country-driven – bottom up rather than top down. Within a unified global framework, national Literacy for All plans and activities will be defined by countries according to their specific conditions, needs and possibilities. UN and other international organisations have a shared responsibility, and must be accountable for it, but in no way should they impose or interfere with countries' decisions. Each country and each community should be free to define which sectors of the population to include and prioritize under the ten-year literacy plan, and which gradual strategy to adopt in order to make Literacy for *All* a reality.

•**Build on what exists**: All countries are engaged in school and out of school literacy provision and development, and many have innovative policies and experiences to consolidate. Thus, rather than creating new or *ad hoc* structures or programmes, efforts must build on what exists, strengthening, expanding or re-directing it, as needed. A key to success lies precisely in merging Literacy Decade activities with the regular life of families, schools, local and national communities, and within the agendas of international organisations.

•**Diversified approaches, strategies, means and methods**: Education, and literacy education in particular, are highly sensitive to contextual and cultural issues. Effective programmes take into account learners' and teachers' previous knowledge, learners' and teachers' needs, motivations and expectations, and the specific conditions of the local culture and the local environment. There is not a single route to literacy or a single method that is best for all and can be applied in any circumstance.

▪**Wide social participation and responsibility**: Literacy for All implies a major crusade involving the local, national and international community. Families, school systems, educational, cultural and religious institutions, libraries, academic and research centres, the mass media, private enterprises, social organisations and sport clubs: all have a place and a role to play in this crusade. State and civil society must renew their interest in literacy promotion and become critical partners in this endeavour.

▪**Gradual approach and positive discrimination policies**: The challenge is setting strategic priorities while adhering to a holistic vision and to systemic efforts. Undoubtedly, the major challenge remains with the illiterate population and those who continue to be denied access to school. However, special efforts are also required to enhance literacy development and use among large portions of the child, youth and adult population who have reached only elementary literacy skills. The traditional gender gap linked to literacy in many countries makes gender a key dimension for positive discrimination policies, both in the school system and in non-formal youth and adult education programmes. However, while girls and women will be the main target for such positive discrimination strategies, in several countries and cases special efforts need to be made to reach boys and men.

VI. CHALLENGES AND COMITTMENTS

•**A renewed and expanded vision of literacy**: A renewed and expanded vision of literacy is essential for success. Such renewed vision admits that literacy is not confined to any particular age (childhood or adulthood), institution (i.e. the school system) or sector (i.e. education); that it is related to various dimensions of personal and social life and development; that it embraces a wide range of scenarios, strategies and means; and that it is a life learning process. It accepts the need to bridge education and culture, and to break away with conventional dichotomies such as child education/adult education, school/out-of-school learning, formal/non-formal modalities, traditional/modern technologies, developing vernacular languages/developing national and international wider communication languages, the local/the global, the particular/the universal.

•**Integrating literacy within *basic education* and within the framework of the Education for All movement**: Literacy is an essential component of basic education and is thus an integral part of basic education policies and reform, both in and out of the school system. Thus, Literacy for All calls for visible linkages with Education for All, rather than to parallel or competing efforts. The Literacy Decade provides an opportunity to further focus and enhance the vision and commitment towards meeting the basic learning needs of all.

▪**Articulating child and adult literacy, school and out of school learning**: Literacy has always been, and remains, a key mission attributed by societies to the school system; out of school learning systems and environments should not be viewed as necessarily compensatory or remedial but as complementary and important in their own right. Literacy for All requires adopting a holistic approach to learning that articulates --- both conceptually and operationally -- child and adult literacy, formal, non-formal and informal education. The concepts of *basic education* and *basic learning needs* devised within Education for All provides an ideal framework for understanding and developing such linkages.

While acknowledging the importance of a holistic, life-long and life-wide approach to literacy, it is also important to bear in mind and caution against the historical tendency to marginalise youth/adult literacy when placed under the rhetoric of comprehensive policies and strategies. Putting in place the two-pronged approach to literacy requires breaking with traditional mindsets and inertias, enhancing systemic awareness of education and educational change, and building a culture of cooperative thinking and doing at all levels and among all actors involved.

▪**Addressing the literacy challenge faced by school education**: Literacy remains a major battle and a major challenge for school systems worldwide. Evaluations conducted in the past few years in both develpoing and industrialised countries show that this is a particularly weak area in school achievement, and a key factor behind extensive grade repetition and school drop out. In fact, the quality of literacy achievement should be a key indicator of the quality of schooling.

▪**Addressing the literacy challenge faced by out-of-school education**: Literacy remains a major battle and a major challenge for youth and adult education programmes outside the regular school system. Precarious literacy levels and relapse into illiteracy are frequent realities and topics of concern and debate among such programmes. Quality, an issue commonly raised in relation to formal

education and school systems, must become also a key issue within the realm of out-of-school education.

▪**Enhancing literate environments**: Efforts towards universal literacy require not only increased enrolment in school or in youth and adult education programmes. Adequate and stimulating literate environments -- at home, in the classroom, in the workplace, in the community, in libraries, in play and sportgrounds, etc.-- are essential to literacy acquisition, development and use. Reading and enjoying reading, writing and enjoying writing, are the most effective routes to effective and meaningful reading and writing. Efforts should thus include provision and better use of school and community libraries, dissemination of printed material, wider access to newspapers, radio, television and computers as well as to a wide range of cultural activities and tools that stimulate and enhance self-expression and communication.

▪**Special attention to the capacity building and the literacy development of educators themselves**: Teachers, and their willigness and capacity to teach and to continue learning, are a key factor related to good or poor educational quality and effective learning achievement. This is true in the case of child and school education, and is also true in the case of adult and of out-of-school education.

However, both the adult and the child literacy field have traditionally moved with the idea that literacy instruction is an easy task, requiring good will and patience more than scientific knowledge and professional development. While the new, inexperienced and less qualified teacher is usually given the first grades in primary school, poor or nonexistent training is usually the norm in the field of adult literacy. The low literacy achievement in both the school system and the adult literacy programmes should thus come as no surprise.

Educators and their own learning needs are a priority to be addressed. This includes enriching their literacy competencies and environments. If educators themselves do not appreciate and make meaningful use of reading and writing, there are little chances that they can teach their students what they do not have. Regular access to reading materials, newspapers and other media, as well as to computers and other modern technologies, have become part of the basic needs of the teaching profession.

▪**Expanding and strengthening parent literacy and general education**: Every child should have the right not only to become literate but to have literate parents. Parents' literacy and education levels have a strong impact on children' s own education and well being. Research also confirms that parent illiteracy influences teacher expectations and decisions regarding student learning

achievement, success or failure in school. However, it is not enough that parents are literate; the aim is to promote the home as a child- and adult-friendly literate environment, where children and adults learn together and from each other, enjoy learning and incorporate literacy to their daily lives.

•**Expanding the information and knowledge base related to literacy**: Available knowledge and information related to child and adult literacy need to be widely disseminated, and permeate teacher training institutions and programmes. At the same time, locally produced and relevant knowledge and information are required to put in place sound, context-sensitive and context-specific policies and programmes. Higher education and research institutions as well as national and international academic communities, have a critical role to play in this endeavour.

▪**Built-in monitoring and evaluation mechanisms**: Built-in monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be defined at the global, regional, national and local level, in accordance and harmony with implementation schedules at each level. Particularly critical will be the development of indicators that are appropriate and relevant to the renewed and expanded vision of literacy advocated within this Literacy Decade framework. "Success", within this framework, relates both to quantities and qualities, to processes and results, to learning acquisition and to effective use of literacy, to the promotion of literacy and to the transformation of attitudes and practices related to it, and ultimately to the impact of literacy development in the improvement of the quality of lives of people.

•**Efficient use of human and financial resources**: Putting in place a ten-year literacy plan calls for a greater amount, and more efficient and judicious use, of financial resources. But also for a more efficient use and strategic development of regional, national and local human resources. Greater and more creative efforts are needed to make full use of existing resources and to mobilise new resources both nationally and internationally.

•**Large scale efforts**: Advancing firmly towards the Literacy for All goal requires large scale efforts supported by wide and sustained social mobilisation. Multiplying local community and NGO-based programmes is insufficient to respond to the challenge. The role of the State is crucial in ensuring the necessary impetus, the coordination of efforts, the compensation of regional and social imbalances, and the monitoring and evaluation of activities and results at the national level.

▪**Addressing the structural problems that are behind poverty and illiteracy**: Literacy -- and education at large -- has a potentially positive impact on personal, social, and economic development.

However, breaking the vicious circle of poverty is beyond the realm of education and requires specific efforts addressed to combat social inequality. Expansion and improvement of learning systems have, in many contexts, reached a limit posed by extreme and increased poverty among large portions of the world population. At the turn of the century, addressing the structural factors that produce poverty has become a pre-requisite for enhanced and effective education efforts.

VII. ELEMENTS FOR A PLAN OF ACTION

The United Nations Literacy Decade challenges Member Nations to reinvigorate and renew their efforts to ensure literacy acquisition, use and development as a right of all.

At the turn of the century, the world community has come to recognise that:

1. literacy is a basic learning need for all – children, youth and adults, in both rural and urban areas, and in both developing and industrialised countries --, a foundation for lifelong learning and a critical dimension of citizenship and social equity;

2. literacy is a dynamic concept and its acquisition a lifelong process, continuously open to new societal demands and challenges;

3. Literacy for All – for children, youth and adults – is the swiftest route to Education for All.

Governments must ensure that literacy is placed at the centre of basic education policies and efforts for all ages, whatever the delivery system – formal or non-formal, face-to-face or distance. They must also ensure that such policies address primarily the most neglected and disadvantaged groups, for reasons of income, age, gender, ethnicity or any other condition.

A decade devoted to literacy provides a reasonable time frame for strategic thinking and planning, and for the definition of long, medium and short term objectives and goals. Countries are invited to define their own plans of action, milestones and paces of implementation, responding to their own specific needs and possibilities, within the spirit of the Literacy Decade Framework and Global Action Plan outlined in this document.

The various scenarios of literacy

Achieving Literacy for All implies addressing multiple and very differentiated target groups and contexts, making use of the various

learning institutions and systems available, and devising differentiated strategies, contents and mechanisms, appropriate and relevant to each of them both at the local, national, regional and global level.

<u>Literacy across institutions and agents</u> Literacy acquisition, development and use can no longer be viewed as the responsibility of a single institution, sector or educational modality. Nor the school system neither out-of-school programmes can accomplish this task in isolation. It requires complementarity and synergy of action among governments, NGOs, universities, churches, teachers, parent and student associations, public and private organisations.

<u>Literacy across sectors</u>: Literacy development is related not only to education but to a comprehensive package of economic, social and cultural policies. Also, literacy relates not only to instruction but also to entertainment and pleasure, and not only to books and printed material but to all forms of human expression and communication. Radio, television, music, dance, folklore, sports, film, theatre and other artistic expressions are in many ways related to the building of a literate culture. Thus the need for holistic and multi- and trans-sectoral approaches and interventions, and for a fruitful convergence between education and culture policies.

<u>Literacy in rural and urban settings</u> Illiteracy has traditionally been perceived and addressed mainly as a rural phenomenon. However, urban illiteracy has become every time more visible over the last few decades as a result of strong rural-urban migration and increased urban poverty. Literacy presents specific challenges in rural and urban settings, and must thus be addressed with differentiated strategies.

<u>Literacy and the family</u> The family remains a fundamental education and learning unit. A literate family environment, where reading and writing become part of daily domestic chores and family life, is perhaps the most powerful means to motivate, make use and further develop reading, writing and calculating.

In the family, three generations interact and mutually support their knowledge and cultural capital. Assisting children with school tasks is a common motivation to literacy by illiterate parents, particularly mothers, across cultures and regions. School going children often become motivators for parental literacy and even literacy instructors in their families, neighbourhoods and communities. Well designed and well organised interventions facilitate schemes where parents and children learn and learn to learn together.

<u>Literacy and the school system</u> Major changes are needed in literacy instruction within the formal school system. Not only because of the poor results in terms of learning achievement but because this is the

entry point of the school system and a key contributor to early school
failure of millions of children around the world. Provision of pre-
school education is important to facilitate the transition to school
and to literacy acquisition, but remedial strategies are only a partial
solution to a school system that needs major transformation.
Provision of textbooks and other printed materials is essential, but it
is not a substitute for curriculum and pedagogical reform and, more
importantly, for teacher training and professionalisation. In fact,
curriculum and pedagogical reform cannot materialise unless
teachers understand and fully participate in the definition and
implementation of the changes proposed. Working with parents and
communities is also essential, so that they too understand and
participate, rather than become obstacles, to education reform.

<u>Literacy and the workplace</u> In a globalised and rapidly changing
world, lifelong learning has become a necessity for all and not only
for a selected minority. Changing production patterns and the rapid
expansion of modern information and communication technologies
place new and more complex demands on work-related literacy
skills. Special efforts must thus be devoted to upgrading such skills
among young people and adults. In this context, it is important to
bear in mind the recommendation of one-hour-a-day for learning in
the workplace made at the 5th International Conference on Adult
Education (CONFINTEA V, Hamburg, 1997).

<u>Literacy and other institutions in the community</u> Besides the family,
the school and the workplace, many other institutions play a critical
role in literacy development.

Libraries, if adequately designed and managed, can become potent
learning centres that complement and enhance what children and
young people learn in school, and provide reading and continuing
learning opportunities for out-of-school youth and for adults. A great
variety of libraries -- school, workplace, community, mobile, public or
private libraries -- can address the specific needs of a wide variety of
readers and become cultural centres with potential to promote local
and community development.

Other cultural centres and resources -- such as community centres,
parks, museums, zoos, circus, cinemas, puppet theaters, clubs, sport
yards, etc. -- are also key partners in the education and literacy
effort.

Media can play a major role in furthering literacy awareness,
appreciation and practice. Regular as well as specially designed
newspapers are useful to ensure continued reading habits. In the
workplace, in-house journals and news bulletins can help further
literacy practice.

The potential of radio, television and video has not been fully utilised for literacy and education purposes. Experiences have been conducted where celebrities are invited to read classics on the radio or to serve as tele-teachers, while learners follow the radio or television programme in print. Also, practice of reading can be promoted through television by providing same language subtitling for specially designed programmes for children, young people and adults.

Cross-sectoral, national and area-based Literacy for All Plans

All the elements discussed above point for the need of Literacy for All Frameworks and Plans of Action that are:

a) <u>Cross-sectoral</u> at both the local, national and global level, that go beyond education as a sector and include broad social and economy institutions and policies.

b) <u>Area- and community-based</u> at the local level, so that:

▪decisions are taken in a genuinely participatory process where all relevant community agents and institutions are involved;
▪the plan and subsequent actions respond to the specific characteristics, needs and assets of each community and zone;
▪convergence, partnership and complementarity among the various community institutions and agents is facilitated and materialized;
▪monitoring and accountability mechanisms are crearly defined at the local level, within a framework of autonomy and responsibility.

c) <u>Comprehensive, flexible and compensatory at the national and sub-national level</u>. The State and the government are responsible for the overall formulation, coordination and implementation of the National Literacy for All Plan, and of providing the necessary impetus and resources. The plan must be flexible so as to incorporate the inputs from civil society and from lessons learnt along implementation, as well as the new circumstances and developments emerged during the decade. Also, in order to avoid further discrimination of the most disadvantaged zones and groups, special measures must be taken and resources allocated to compensate regional and social imbalances between zones and local communities. While participation and involvement of the civil society is critical to the success to the Literacy Decade, governmental will and commitment toward the Literacy for All goal remain the most critical factor for advancement and success.

Strategies

▪**Public information, consultation and participation**: A broad information, consultation and participation process around the meanings, goals and means of literacy, Literacy for All and the Literacy Decade needs to be built at the local, national, regional and global level. In order to be viable and succeed, planning and action at the various levels must engage the knowledge, motivation and commitment of the directly involved. This will ensure not only greater relevance of policies and programmes *vis a vis* the specific contexts but the necessary ownership and capacity building that are key to sustainable educational and social interventions. Explicit and permanent participatory and partnership building mechanisms are required at all levels.

▪**Capacity building and teacher education**: Putting in place a ten-year action plan like the one described here, and for which a renewed vision of literacy is essential, implies putting public education and capacity building at the very center. Not only for teachers and literacy instructors, but for all education agents involved from local to global levels, and from the various sectors and institutions engaged: school system, out-of-school or non-formal programmes, government, NGOs, universities, teacher and parent associations, local communities, etc.

More of the same will not be the answer. Major innovations must be introduced in the traditional capacity building and training strategies both for professional and para-professional staff. New trends in teacher education and professional development being experimented in different parts of the world show the importance of elements such as:

Teacher *education* and not just teacher *training*: Meeting the complex demands posed on teachers today requires a broad *education* effort (understanding the phenomena and problems related to their task, and developing theoretical-practical competencies to identify and solve them) with a necessary *training* dimension (development of skills to accomplish specific tasks).

Diversified partners for teacher education: Together with the State, universities, NGOs, cultural institutions and teacher organizations themselves have a fundamental role in the preparation and professional development of education agents.

Learning by doing and by reflecting on practice: Self-reflection and systematization of their own pedagogical practice is the best tool teachers have for their professional advancement. Teachers can only modify their practice, in a conscious and creative manner, if they develop a capacity for critically analyzing such practice.

Starting from teacher needs and demands: Teachers' knowledge, experience and active participation in the definition of their learning needs are essential. However, responding to teachers' own learning demands is only the starting point; teacher education itself must be viewed as a process that enables teachers to amplify and reorient their learning needs towards a more professional and autonomous role.

Teacher education as adult education: Teacher education is, by definition, *adult education*. Teacher education could benefit enormously from valuable knowledge and practical experience accumulated within the adult education field.

The importance of "seeing" change in action: Nothing is more conducive to change than "seeing" change in action. This idea is behind the widespread dissemination of innovations, "good practices", "demonstrative schools", "effective schools", etc. Thus the importance of identifying, documenting and disseminating inspiring and innovative education experiences, in the first place within the same country or region.

Teachers sharing with other teachers: Breaking with the isolation of teaching has finally been acknowledged as a personal and a professional need. Teachers learn when they meet other teachers to exchange and discuss common issues of their profession. Evidently, collegial work implies space and time specially reserved for this in the workplace as well as within their education/training programme both in school and out-of-school contexts.

Self-study: The notion of *learning* is strongly associated with *teaching*, schools and teachers. Educating for self-study, for autonomous learning, constitutes a serious deficiency of school systems and of teacher education/training programmes both initial and in-service. Teachers are at the same time victims and allies of this deficiency. Therefore the need to develop study habits among teachers and to reinforce distance education with face-to-face interaction and continuous monitoring.

Joyful learning for teachers, too: Joy and play have been acknowledged as children´s needs but denied to adults, and to teachers in particular. However, both teachers and learners need to enjoy learning. Play, laughter, music and dance should be part of any good teacher education and training programme.

▪**Monitoring and assessment**: The Literacy for All Decade advocates for country-driven initiatives and country-specific plans of action. In this context, monitoring and assessment at the global level poses the challenge of celebrating diversity while ensuring a unified vision, framework and plan.

The Literacy Decade will be an opportunity to address some weaknesses and long-pending tasks of the literacy field such as the building of more adequate and reliable categories and indicators. Literacy indicators, for decades reduced to the adult illiteracy/literacy dichotomy, must be widened to comprise other related indicators such as: pre-school and primary school enrolment, attendance and completion; out of school children and youth; literacy achievement in school and out-of school education; availability of newspapers, printed materials, and libraries; access to computers and Internet; etc.

Refining literacy statistics is a major need and a challenge in itself. Concrete steps that can be taken at both global, regional, country and local level include:

- Full utilisation of the year 2000 and 2010 rounds of national population censuses to collect comprehensive data on illiteracy by gender and age-groups for entire populations.

- Use of sample household and demographic surveys to collect additional data on adult illiteracy.

- Introducing test-measurement of various literacy levels during demographic censuses and surveys so as to improve the quality of literacy statistics, by :

a)   developing and disseminating modular literacy testing-measurement methodologies, instruments and operational guidelines;
b)   generating national commitment to organise literacy test-measurement activities as well as donor/university/NGO support to implementation;
c)   promoting systematic analysis of literacy assessment results in relation to individual/household/community characteristics so as to identify key factors and effective measures for ensuring universal literacy.

- Establishment of international, regional and national literacy monitoring mechanisms and databases.

- Longitudinal tracking of neo-literates.

▪**Documentation and research**: Very little of what has been done in the field of literacy worldwide, both in and out of school, has been properly documented and analysed. This is true for both failures and successes, for both conventional and innovative experiences. Often, assertions about the "failure" or "success" of past adult literacy programmes and campaigns in developing countries are built on anecdotal information or are overgeneralizations based on a few case studies. Documenting and critically systematizing past and present experiences and processes is thus a priority within the Literacy Decade. Not only for sharing them with others but as a formative activity that is an essential component of professional and institutional development.

Research is also a major debt, particularly in the field of adult literacy. The absence of documented experience and locally produced research reinforces the conditions for the continued import of theories and models that often have been thought for, and developed in, different social and cultural environments and under very different conditions.

While the field of child literacy has developed an important body of research over the past three decades, nothing similar has ocurred *vis a vis* adult literacy. This is attributable to the marginal resources usually available for this field, but also to the often poor quality and lack of relevance of the reserach produced. Strengthening and further developing local and endogenous research capacity is part of the Literacy for All agenda, as well as building new types of partnerships involving universities, NGOs and local communities.

▪**Information exchange, networking, and North-South and South-South cooperation**: Information sharing and networking have expanded considerably thanks to the new information and communication technologies. However, access to such technologies remains a dream for the illiterate population and, in general, for the education community linked to the adult literacy field on the ground. Access to computers and Internet has expanded in the school system in the last couple of years, but it is far from reaching the totality of the schools in most developing countries.

Thus, together with democratizing and making the best use possible of such modern technologies, information sharing and networking must rely heavily on, strenghten and improve, face to face and conventional information and communication technologies and means.

North-South relationships will continue to be important. However, probably the best contribution the North can make within this Literacy Decade in terms of information sharing and networking is

assisting developing countries develop and strengthen South-South
linkages, exchange and cooperation.