

Adult learning and education in the states of the Arab Region

A synthesis report

Dr Abdelwahid Abdalla Yousif

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

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Acknowledgements

Half-way through my journey to put this synthesis together, I realised that I had actually underestimated the amount of time and mental and physical effort required for completing a task which, at times, appeared to be an uphill struggle (like all work in literacy and adult education in most of the so-called developing countries).

The reports that were prepared by the states of the region to be my primary source of information and guidance were, in some cases, not very coherent; in others not even complete, and yet in others sounded like administrative briefs. In very few cases they were reasonably clear. However, they were all confined to the narrow focus of a traditional approach to literacy and adult education putting the whole issue in a “strait jacket”. I tried my best to get the best out of a difficult situation.

During this very taxing journey, I received a great deal of encouragement and support from many friends and colleagues. I am indebted to all of them. I would, however, like particularly to thank Dr. Majed Al Noaimi, the Minister of Education in Bahrain for allowing me to undertake this task; Dr. Adama Ouane, the Director of UIL, my former colleague and “comrade-in-arms”, for the trust and the support; his colleagues at UIL for their patience and support; Dr. Abdel-Moneim Osman, Director of UNESCO, Beirut Office, and my family who bore with me during the long days of the Holy Month of Ramadan. Last, but not least, I would like to thank my competent colleague Mrs. Blossom Cordeiro who has patiently and efficiently typed this report.

Dr. Abdelwahid Yousif

Manama
Kingdom of Bahrain

18 October 2008

Introduction

The assignment I was given by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in Hamburg was to prepare a synthesis of the national reports that were submitted by governments of the region on the state of Adult Learning and Education. These had been written in preparation for the Regional Conference for Arab States to be held in Tunis in January 2009, the outcome of which will be incorporated into the documents that will be presented by UNESCO to CONFINTEA VI in Brazil in May 2009. The guidance given by UIL to the Governments was clear: “To prepare national reports on the status of adult learning and education”.

However, the reports (submitted by only 17 out of 21 countries) focus on a very narrow perspective of Adult Learning and Education, as understood in the traditional sense of the term, namely the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy. They discuss the first stage of adult education that follows the basic literacy level, known in these countries as the post-literacy stage, in which there are two main objectives: (i) to consolidate the skills acquired in the basic level, and (ii) to provide learners with basic skill training and general information on daily life practices in health, population, the environment and so on.

The national reports have, in reality, left out a whole host of important institutions and government departments that provide a very rich and important range of adult learning in the region. Such institutions and departments include:

- universities and their immense contribution through their divisions of university extension or extra-mural studies services, their training programmes for adult education personnel, and their contributions to research in adult education;
- private institutes which cover a wide range of training programmes in every country, ranging from training for office secretarial work to computer sciences; with thousands of learners attending on a part-time basis;
- religious teaching councils (Majalis Al-Ilm) which take the form of study circles convened in Mosques and “Zawyats”;
- Qor’anic schools for children and youth which can be counted in tens of thousands, particularly in countries such as Sudan, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia and Yemen;
- training programmes provided by Government departments of agriculture (agricultural extension service), labour, health and social affairs; and
- educational and general cultural programmes that are intended to influence public opinion.

All the educational and training programmes provided by the above-mentioned institutions and departments are legitimate components of adult learning and education networks in all countries of the region. Leaving them out is an act of injustice done to the region. It was not possible for the present synthesis report to cover all those areas for which no information was available. The best means to rectify this situation would be for UIL to remind the countries of the region that

there will be an opportunity for them to try and fill in the missing information during the regional conference in Tunisia in January 2009

The national reports were written in three languages: Arabic (ten), French (two) and English (five). Many of the reports did not follow the guidelines proposed by UIL; and that made the task of synthesising those reports even more difficult.

Finally, the regional picture is really incomplete because four countries (United Arab Emirates, Libya, Somalia and Djibouti) did not submit their reports. Another gap is the absence in the national report on Sudan of any reference to the very serious situation in the Southern part of the Sudan which has recently emerged from a devastating civil war lasting more than a quarter of a century. I looked, in vain, for materials on Somalia. For Southern Sudan I decided to annex to this report an extract from a report I prepared for UNESCO in March 2007 on the occasion of the regional conference on literacy in the Arab States which was held in Qatar. I do hope that the authorities in all of these countries will make an effort to fill in the gaps.

The regional context

The Arab States region is made up of 21 countries spread over the two continents of Asia and Africa, with a population of 320 million people, a common language, a common culture and a common history, but not without the co-existence of diverse cultural, social, economic and political features. Some countries are doing well in terms of material wealth, while others are extremely poor. Since 1990 the proportion of people living below US\$1 per day has improved, but the proportion living below US\$2 per day has increased from 21 per cent to 23 per cent of the population. About one out of five people in the region lives on less than US\$2 a day, according to World Bank estimates.

Military conflicts, foreign occupation, civil strife and political instability have over recent decades had a serious negative impact on every aspect of life in countries such as Iraq, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, and Lebanon. In addition to the loss of life and property, an increase in the number of displaced people and the creation of psychological and economic insecurity, there has been a marked deterioration in the quantity and the quality of social services. While the impact in health and education is particularly marked in those countries, all countries in the region have been affected, to varying degrees.

According to UNFPA, the population in the region will be 372 million by 2020. Some 34 per cent of the region's population is below the age of 15 and the median age is 22 years. Unemployment is generally high (about 15 per cent of the active workforce), and the rates among youth are twice the average.

General challenges facing the region

A group of prominent Arab intellectuals who wrote the 2002 UNDP *Arab Human Development Report* observed that some of the major challenges the region will face in the new millennium are linked to three key deficits that can be considered defining features:

- a freedom deficit
- the limited participation of women, and
- a human capabilities/knowledge deficit relative to income.¹

The authors of the *Report* arrived at this conclusion by scrutinising Arab socio-economic systems from the perspective of human development in its broader sense, encompassing freedom and human rights.

Gender empowerment, according to the *Report*, is still a critical aspect of human development. For example, women's share of professional and technical positions, and their share of parliamentary seats both rank next to last among all world regions. Only sub-Saharan Africa has a lower score.

The *Report* suggests that the significant "knowledge gap" in the Region should be addressed by taking simultaneous action in three linked and potentially synergistic areas: "knowledge

¹ UNDP *Arab Human Development Report* (2002)

absorption, acquisition and communication”. Access to and use of technology is limited (only 0.6 per cent of the population uses the internet). The Region has the lowest level of access to ICT of all regions of the world.²

Related to these deficits and some of their consequences is a whole host of other challenges:

- Some 65 million adults are non-literate (some sources put the figure between 58 and 61 million), two-thirds of whom are women, and an estimated 10 million children aged 6–15 are out of school. This number is likely to increase by 40 per cent by 2015 if current trends persist.
- Despite remarkable progress in the education of girls and in the empowerment of women, the gender gap is still wide, with women very under-represented in managerial and decision-making jobs.
- There is a major mismatch between the output of educational systems and labour market needs.
- Poverty and deprivation remain real in many Arab States. In some cases, as in Palestine and Somalia, they have reached extreme levels.
- The problem of dependency of the region on other countries who are leaders in the production of knowledge has limited the development of its own capacity.
- A choice has to be made between, on the one hand, remaining weak and marginal by facing the challenges of the region individually and, on the other, constructing institutional arrangements that can transform the huge potential of Arab unity.³

Challenges facing education

According to UNESCO, there has been some progress towards universal primary education (UPE) between 1999 and 2004 but the rate is still lower than that in other regions. The number of children enrolled in primary schools rose by six per cent, well below the rate in sub-Saharan Africa (27 per cent) and South and West Asia (19 per cent). The net enrolment rate (NER) in the region rose by only four per cent, with variation from one country to the other. Some countries have registered an increase of more than 12 per cent.

More than 6 million children of school age (about 10 million according to some sources) are out of school. About 60 per cent of them are girls. Nearly two-thirds of these children have never been enrolled in school, and about 13 per cent have left school early. There are many reasons behind non-enrolment of these children, including shortage of school space, poverty, gender, tradition, parents’ lack of education, and place of residence (8.7 per cent of those children live in rural areas).⁴

On the other hand, those who have left school early are estimated as one-third of those who enter primary school. In a study on out-of-school children and youth (OSCY) in the Middle East and

² *ibid*

³ *ibid*

⁴ UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report, *Strong Foundations, Early Childhood Care and Education* (2006, 2007, 2009)

North Africa region (MENA) which includes the Islamic Republic of Iran and all Arab States with the exception of Sudan and Somalia, this segment of the population is defined as “persons ages 6 years and up to about 20 years of age who should be in compulsory schooling, but are not.” The study estimates that “about 9 million children – nearly 5 million children aged 6 to 10 and another 4 million children aged 11 to 15 – were out of school in 1995. By 2015, these numbers are projected to increase to 7.5 million and 5–6 million, respectively for a potential total of 13 million children and youth who are of school age and who will not be in school. Only a significant policy shift can turn around this serious situation of OSCY in MENA”.⁵

Non-formal education programmes, according to UNESCO’s 2007 *Global Monitoring Report*, are “extremely diverse throughout the region and differ in terms of objectives, target groups, content, pedagogy, scale and type of providers.”

Adult and youth literacy

Literacy constitutes Objective 4 of the Dakar Forum Declaration. The target agreed in Dakar was to halve the 2000 illiteracy rate by the end of 2015. In the Arab region there has been an increase in the literacy rate of about 16 per cent between 1999 and 2000–2004, and the absolute number of non-literate adults during the same period declined from about 64 million to around 58 million. This figure (58 million) is confirmed by UNESCO’s 2009 *Global Monitoring Report (GMR)* which notes that the average literacy rate increased from 58 per cent to 72 per cent. The rise was more pronounced among women, climbing from 46 per cent to just over 61 per cent. Despite this, the *GMR* continues, rates in the region remain below the developing country average (79 per cent). According to UNESCO, this number is expected to remain as high as 55 million by 2015.

Today, on average, only two-thirds of adults across the Arab States can read and write with understanding. However, the literacy rates in the region vary from one country to another, ranging from below 60 per cent in Morocco, Egypt, Mauritania and Sudan to above 90 per cent in Kuwait and Palestine and above 95 per cent in Bahrain. Governments will need to expand adult literacy programmes significantly and improve the quality of provision, particularly with regard to women, if they are to meet or come near to meeting the EFA target. In 2004 more than two-thirds of adult non-literates were women. The gender parity index (GPI) for adult literacy was 0.72, with a value of below 0.50 in some countries of the region. However, in primary education parity increased from 87 girls enrolled to every 100 boys in 1999 to 90 in 2004.

Many obstacles hinder access to and participation in education by females, including tradition, poverty, distance to school and an insecure school environment. These are all real sources of exclusion that governments should act to remove.⁶

Are the Arab States near to achieving the EFA Goals by 2015?

The Education for All Development Index (EDI), introduced by UNESCO in the 2003–2004 EFA *GMR*, focuses on the four more easily quantified EFA goals: UPE, adult literacy, gender parity and equality, and education quality, each proxied by an indicator. The EDI was calculated in 2004 for 16 of the Arab States and the results were published in the 2007 *GMR*:

- none of the states had yet achieved the four EFA goals;

⁵ World Bank, *New Challenges Facing the Education Sector in MENA* (Chapter Three) (2007)

⁶ UNESCO, *Global Monitoring Report* (2007)

- only one (Bahrain) is close to doing so, with an EDI value of 0.95;
- 11 countries (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates) are in an intermediate position, with EDI values between 0.80 and 0.94. In most of these countries, low adult literacy rates pull down the overall EDI; and
- four countries (Djibouti, Mauritania, Morocco and Yemen) are far from achieving the EFA goals, with EDI scores below 0.80. Improvement is needed on all four components.⁷

Most of the Arab States improved their EDI value from 2003 to 2004, with increases of 7 per cent in Egypt and 14 per cent in Mauritania. These changes were mainly due to improvements in adult literacy in Egypt and to both the GPI and the survival rate to Grade 5 in Mauritania.

The *GMR* of 2009 shows that the United Arab Emirates have joined Bahrain as being very close to achieving the four quantifiable EFA goals included in the index, and that Iraq has replaced Morocco in the four countries furthest from achieving the EFA goals.

With reference to the Dakar Goal of halving illiteracy by 50 per cent by 2015, the UNLD mid-decade report presented to the UN General Assembly in September 2008 indicates that “unless progress is significantly accelerated, most countries in sub-Saharan Africa and West Asia and the Arab States have a small chance of reaching this goal”.⁸

The relevance of lifelong learning to the current educational situation

The national reports all have a narrow understanding of adult education (reading, writing and numeracy) and focus on the immediate post-literacy stage of consolidation with low-level skill training. This falls far short of the concept embodied in CONFINTEA V.⁹

In the Arab States region Governments, civil society and the private sector must contemplate a new role and a new place for education in general and for adult education in particular to meet some, if not all, of the major challenges they face. As the World Bank states, there are many new domains in which adult education must play a part. These include globalisation, communication technologies and the increasing importance of knowledge in the development process.¹⁰

The present state of education in the region as a whole is fraught with serious gaps that only a comprehensive system of lifelong learning can fill, particularly for the benefit of youth and adults who are not in school, and who are in dire need of training to carry out the urgent job of modernisation. The need is equally pressing with regard to graduates of post-compulsory education who need to join the workforce, and to secondary school-leavers who need skills and competencies required by the knowledge economy. Even graduates of tertiary education can no longer consider a university diploma or even a Doctorate sufficient for a job without renewal of knowledge and skills.¹¹

Finally, the most serious challenge of all is the “youth bulge” (15–24 years old) in the region and the high levels of early school-leaving and out-of-school youth.

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ UNESCO, *Report to the UN General Assembly on the UN Literacy Decade* (September 2008)

⁹ UNESCO, *Report of the International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V)*, UIE, Hamburg (1997)

¹⁰ World Bank, *New Challenges Facing the Education Sector in MENA* (Chapter Three) (2007)

¹¹ *ibid*

The main trends

The scope of the national reports *versus* UIL expectations

The national reports focus on literacy and adult education in the narrow traditional sense of the term. Most of the reports consider the terms “literacy” and “adult education” interchangeable. They speak of literacy as the acquisition of the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy, followed by a post-literacy stage, the objectives of which are to consolidate the skills acquired during the basic literacy stage, and to provide the learner with some basic training in life skills and general knowledge and culture. The analysis in all the national reports, with the exception of one country (Kuwait), concentrates on the activities of the particular Ministry mandated to provide literacy and adult education – in most cases, the Ministry of Education (the Ministry of Culture in Syria and the Ministry of Social Affairs in Morocco and Tunisia). The term “Adult Learning and Education” (ALE) is not known in this region.

Policies and strategies

While policies and strategies differ between the 17 countries of the region which have submitted reports, the underlying governing concept common to all is the limited one of literacy as the ability to read, write and calculate. It is not surprising, therefore, that the issues raised in the national reports have a focus on basic literacy, post-literacy and non-formal education at the preliminary level of vocational skills training.

Given this prevalent view, most countries’ policies on adult education have literacy as the starting point. Strategic objectives may include reducing drop-out rates from the formal education system, attacking the source of illiteracy by providing access to primary education for all children of school age, and organising literacy campaigns.

An explicit rights-based view to literacy and adult education informs policy in some countries. Sudan considers “education a human right of every citizen”. Lebanon seeks to give the “literacy concept a human and developmental dimension for reading and writing skills to become a means of all individuals to reach better living conditions.” The Education Act (2005) in Bahrain sets out the following: “the eradication of illiteracy and the provision of adult education is a national responsibility whose objective is to raise the standards of the citizens culturally, socially and professionally”. In some instances the integration of adult education with other developmental agendas is a deliberate policy orientation. In Mauritania, combating illiteracy and poverty is viewed as an important part of the national plan for economic development.

All countries in the region are unanimous in their strong political commitment to combatting illiteracy among youth and adults (aged 10–45 in some countries and 15–40 in others), with varying degrees of provision of the necessary resources for making good such a commitment. Literacy and adult education policies are, in most countries, incorporated into their national education policies, with a few countries applying a special Act or Law on the eradication of illiteracy (Egypt, Kuwait and Tunisia). However, only a limited number of countries have managed to translate their literacy and adult education policies into action plans (Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen and Kuwait).

A growing strategic trend in all countries of the region is to direct special programmes to non-literate adults and youth who have never been to school, on the one hand, and to early school-leavers on the other. Morocco's national charter on education (2000) makes literacy a social obligation of the state, and stipulates that priority should be given to rural areas and to women. Some countries base their national strategies on the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) model: Algeria's strategy, implemented in partnership with several government departments, civil society organisations, the private sector and international organisations, aims to eradicate literacy completely by 2016. Saudi Arabia's national education policy includes a substantial section on illiteracy, stating that the country is concerned about "combatting illiteracy and supports this kind of education morally, financially and administratively to achieve the goal of literacy for all citizens and to generalise culture".

Legal and administrative framework

The legal and administrative framework within which adult education is organised varies according to each country's political system, the style of governance, the relative importance given by the government to adult education, and the link between adult education and other developmental institutions (whether they are public, private or civil society organisations).

Most of the states in the region have some kind of national framework which embodies both legal and administrative aspects. Exceptionally, there is a constitutional statement, as in Egypt: "literacy and adult education is a national commitment which each organisation in the Egyptian community contributes to".

Far more usual are Acts or Charters that set out the structures and agencies responsible for adult education and literacy. This can be the role of a single government department, as in Mauritania, which has a national committee for literacy within the Ministry of Education. Alternatively, two or more Departments work in concert. Jordan's Ministry of Education, for instance, oversees the national committee for literacy and adult education, which includes membership from the Ministry of Social Development. The Ministries of Education and Culture in Syria have a shared responsibility for combating adult illiteracy. More nebulous and all-encompassing formations come, for example, from legislation in Yemen which makes the government, public agencies and institutions responsible for eradicating literacy.

The composition of national bodies in charge of adult education and literacy may include not only government officials from one or more Ministries, but also representatives from NGOs, academics, trade unions and broadcasting services, as in Tunisia's National Council for Adult Education. In other instances, representatives from the private sector may also be involved.

The strategic importance of adult education is symbolised in a few instances by direct high-level governmental commitment and involvement. Morocco's Prime Minister, for example, chairs the national committee on literacy and non-formal education.

Several countries have hierarchical structures that devolve functions from centre to periphery, with national decision-making feeding into provincial and regional branch structures and then to local operational units. In Sudan the geographical redistribution of administrative functions to the 26 *Wilayat* (provinces) necessitates coordination and cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Education.

Tunisia's national programme for adult education calls for an approach which promotes complementarity between adult education institutions. Although it is undoubtedly important to

have joint effort, common goals and division of labour between all actors in literacy and adult education, some countries are concerned to demarcate clear boundaries. This is in order not only to establish clear lines of responsibility and accountability, but also to separate out the political from the operational aspects. Mauritania, for example, specifies in its national report the need for the Ministry of Education to take care of strategy while leaving the implementation tasks to other players.

Objectives and priorities

Typical objectives are to increase the acquisition of the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy by as many people as possible, but with priority given to particular target groups. Post-literacy, the objectives are to consolidate the knowledge and skills acquired and to provide learners with some general knowledge and life skills for everyday living, as well as some religious knowledge, attitudes and citizenship.

An element of most countries' educational objectives is to help non-literates and those who have left school early to achieve a level equivalent to a particular grade in primary or in secondary school. Such objectives are usually expressed qualitatively, and few countries (Yemen, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Jordan) quantify the number of non-literates they intend to reach. Priority common target groups frequently cited in national policies are:

- non-literates in the 10–45 age group (15–40 in some countries);
- women;
- those who have dropped out of school;
- the rural population;
- excluded groups (ethnic, linguistic, the poor); and
- displaced and refugee groups.

Sudan makes reference to Bedouins and Algeria to disabled people as special target groups, while Saudi Arabia has programmatic provision for senior citizens. In addition, in several countries there is a declared intent to direct resources and commitment to provinces or districts with the lowest levels of educational or literacy attainment.

The overall aim is to empower these groups to become active participants in the transformation of their societies, focusing on values, attitudes and behaviour which enable individuals to learn to live together in a world characterised by diversity and pluralism (Lebanon).

The range of the target groups and their learning needs has attracted many different providers, among whom there is a critical need for better coordination – a task which a national council or committee on adult education could ensure. Not all countries in the region have such a body, which would have not only a coordinating and oversight role but also the critical one of advocacy for adult education.

The improvement of skills is a necessary goal not only for economic development but also for individuals and communities. Among the objectives indicated in the national reports is the need to produce trained labour for employment in the internal as well as external labour markets (Jordan). Upgrading the skills and knowledge of graduates and professionals is noted by the Palestinian report. Other strategic objectives worthy of mention are the need to improve coordination among all providers (Yemen) and to ensure practical training for teachers (Syria).

Programme implementation

Programmes reflect national objectives, focussing on three types of provision:

- basic literacy programmes, which include the 3Rs;
- post-literacy programmes to reinforce knowledge and skills acquired; and
- equivalency for those who have dropped out of school.

None of the national reports refer to a National Qualification Framework (NQF).

With respect to youth and those who have left school early, all countries recognise that the problem of illiteracy is rooted in the poor quality of education provided and limited access for children of school age. Furthermore, a dilemma which every literacy and adult education programme has to grapple with is the very fragile infrastructure of literacy and adult education which “piggy-backs” on this weak structure of formal primary education.

The literacy and adult education programme in the vast majority of countries is under-resourced, with little professional organisation and management, and limited vision and knowledge of how to bring about a substantial improvement in people’s lives. There are many constraints, but the biggest hurdle is the under-estimation of the magnitude of the struggle to achieve literacy. That seems to be a general pattern in most of the countries of the region. There is also a lack of political will to match the challenges posed by globalisation and the needs of the knowledge economy.

Curriculum and method

At basic level in all countries the curricula concentrate on the 3Rs. They are in some cases borrowed from primary school textbooks, with some modifications. Some countries use curricula that are specially designed for adult learning, though they generally follow a theoretical approach which is often detached from the reality of adults’ everyday lives. It is fair to say that there is a move away from the approach of standardised materials (one-size-fits-all), which has dominated the scene for a long time, towards a more localised approach where assessment surveys help determine learners’ needs (Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Yemen, Mauritania and Sudan). CSOs are more likely to be innovative in introducing more learner-generated models using, for example, REFLECT methodology (Egypt and Sudan).

Curricula for early school-leavers are designed according to a remedial programme to respond to the particular needs of this target group. Skill development and vocational training curricula differ from country to country, and there are also variations within countries.

Literacy curricula are phased to cater to different levels of ability, ranging in duration from 18 months upwards. Algeria’s 18-month curriculum gives an equivalent of 756 study hours to reach the level of completion of exercises in comprehension, writing and practical application of calculation. The primary aim is to meet the basic needs of the learner, but often subjects are related to the daily life of the adult, typically including Arabic language, mathematics, social studies, cultural studies, general science and Islamic education. Citizenship, the family, health, social and economic life and the environment feature in Tunisia’s curriculum.

Successful completion of the literacy course is usually marked by the award of a certificate conferring equivalence to primary school completion. From this point the learner can continue to study either through the formal education system or through non-formal education channels with intermediate and secondary school equivalence (Saudi Arabia). The “adult library” project in the

Sultanate of Oman promotes the continuity of adults' learning and the sustainability of adult education courses by providing adult learners with different types of reading materials.

For vocational training courses, the aim is to provide the learner with the minimum information and technical skills needed for daily life. Fees can be modest, as in Jordan, where 30- to 40-hour courses are offered.

At the post-literacy stage, more attention is given to developing different curricula to suit different groups. Women's life skills programmes are a good example in all the countries in the region. Teaching and learning methods are very traditional; a replica of conventional school methods. They emphasise drilling and leave very little room for learner interaction. Applying ICTs in teaching and learning is not yet common in the region. However, some countries (Egypt) have used radio and television for literacy and post-literacy teaching, the outcomes of which are yet to be measured. There are some limited experiences in Sudan, Morocco and Palestine. Kuwait, however, has more extensive practice in using ICTs. There is a shortage of learning materials, especially for neo-literates.

In Sudan some of the NGOs organise their programmes in innovative ways. A good example is a project for women in displacement camps, organised by the NGO GOAL. It uses the REFLECT approach which is based on an analysis of socio-economic and socio-cultural surveys carried out in the target area. No text book and no standard material are used, simply a locally-devised manual for literacy facilitators.

Personnel

There is a consensus that the issue of personnel represents the weakest link in the literacy and adult education set-up. While administrative and technical personnel are, in general, professionally trained, the situation with regard to teachers is different. They are nearly all part-timers, made up of three main categories:

- trained formal (mainly primary) schoolteachers, some of whom are given short training courses on how to teach adults;
- technicians and specialists in certain subject areas who are engaged to teach life skills programmes; and
- volunteers from different walks of life with varying levels of education and experience, but most are secondary school-leavers or university students.

The general agreement is that part-time teachers are neither well trained nor well remunerated, and many of them are not motivated enough to exert the necessary effort. According to *GMR* 2006, "it is essential to professionalize literacy educators, providing them with adequate pay and training. At present they are paid little if any regular remuneration, lack job security, have few training opportunities, and rarely benefit from ongoing professional support." On the other hand, volunteers (and particularly those who come from CSOs), though not remunerated, are deeply committed to the tasks they are asked to perform.

It is reported that Omani teachers are reluctant to teach in adult education classes. As a result, the task is given to expatriate teachers to carry out after their normal working hours. The government is considering two options: either increasing the financial reward or reducing the workload for schoolteachers who teach in adult education. During 2000-2001 a project was launched to recruit school-leavers to teach literacy classes. This proved to be a success, and has been adopted as one means of enrolling personnel.

Morocco's training of trainers is unique in the region in that it categorises staff into animators, inspectors, regional and local organisers, and coordinators of CSOs. The training covers organisational as well as educational aspects. All other countries specify some limited initial training, followed by periodic short training session per year. Several countries in the region (among them Egypt, Sudan and Jordan, Kuwait and Tunisia) require academic qualifications for teaching adults. A professional qualification in adult education is essential in Mauritania, Jordan, Tunisia and Sudan. In Algeria 88.6 per cent of the 10,000 literacy and adult education teachers are women.

Financing

Reports from all countries suggest that funding is inadequate. Government is the main source of funding, but the amounts allocated to literacy and adult education fall far short of what is required for running an efficient system. The reports provide little data on how much is provided by government and how that compares to allocations made for primary, secondary and tertiary education. There are no break-downs of expenditure with regard to literacy and adult education programme components. Equally absent is some indication on how efficiently the budget is used: no analysis of cost-effectiveness is available. There is no indication either of how much it costs, for example, to change a person's status from illiterate to literate, or of the impact of illiteracy on a country's development.

CSOs in all countries make a useful contribution not only in kind by supporting government efforts in mobilising learners and in teaching, but also by organising their own literacy and adult education programmes. External financial support is given to some countries in the region by regional organisations and institutions (ALECSO, ISESCO, AGFUND, Qatar Foundation) as well as by international organisations (UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, ILO, World Bank). However, there is little coordination among these donors.

Research

Although universities are generally represented on the national policy-making bodies (National Councils or Committees), there has been little reference to the role of universities and research centres in literacy and adult education. Most of the universities have their own extension, outreach or extra-mural divisions which provide different types of adult education, ranging from liberal studies to high-level professional training (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Sudan and Egypt). A few universities provide training programmes for adult educators and sponsor research into different aspects of adult education (Sudan, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Egypt). Because of the very narrow focus of the national reports, that sort of contribution has received little or no attention.

In the Arab States region, as in most of the developing world, research is the last area to be considered in depth when literacy and adult education policies are formulated. Policy-makers give priority to formal education; the low-ranking and indeterminate nature of adult education does not attract education specialists; and so far social scientists and economists have not, in general, been able to grasp the importance of the linkages between adult education and their own fields of specialisation.

There is no question that the quality of adult education provision and the value of its input into sustainable development can only be raised if policies and strategies are based on knowledge and experience. Practitioners in this domain, just like other domains, can only obtain results by

formulating and testing hypotheses in real-life situations. Only compelling evidence derived from systematic inquiry can convince governments and donors that it is worth investing in adult education. Areas which attract researchers' attention include, for example:

- planning adult education as an integral part of the national development strategy;
- setting standards and evaluating outcomes;
- applying ICTs in literacy and adult education programmes;
- quality assurance; and
- building a data resource on adult learning.

Moreover, because of adult education's diverse objectives and practical contribution to improving the daily lives of learners, applied and active research which is participatory in nature is highly appropriate. This does not in any way mean that pure research should be discouraged, but rather that researchers should remember the policy and practice implications of their output.

There is no outstanding regional research centre designated to do research in the field of adult education. Equally missing is a specialised regional centre for training literacy and adult education personnel and for curriculum development. There is a desperate need for a regional centre to undertake the kind of work formerly carried out by the Arab States Functional Education Centre (ASFEC) in Egypt, under the auspices of UNESCO.

It is important to note that the type of research referred to in this report cannot be left to universities and research centres alone. It must be done in close partnership between these specialised institutions and other key stakeholders, namely providers, learners and practitioners.

Innovation and good practice

Despite all the constraints that have put literacy and adult education in a strait-jacket, all countries in the region endeavour to sponsor innovation and good practice, ranging from the use of ICTs in programme delivery (Sudan, Palestine and Egypt) to the design of model learning environments (Saudi Arabia and Oman) where illiteracy-free zones and the learning village models stand out as examples.

Tunisia's literacy programme has enabled some learners to break through the poverty cycle through income-generating projects; another innovative project has secured the inclusion of a special supplement aimed at neo-literates in a weekly newspaper. There has also been the creation of clubs for self-teaching (under the guidance of adult education societies). A television programme in the form of a drama series acts as a follow-up to adult education classes in Palestine, allowing men and women to learn at their own pace.

Syria has a special project for girls' education in collaboration with UNICEF, and established boarding schools for Bedouin children. A project in Mauritania has adopted a multi-media approach in literacy practice, with a radio programme on literacy in collaboration with a Spanish NGO. The Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman, through the Adult Learner's Library scheme, provides every neo-literate with a set of 30 books as a gift to keep and use at home. Bahrain has established kindergartens for children while mothers attend literacy classes and has enabled adult learners to use school learning resource centres in any location they choose.

The role of civil society organisations

A review of the history of education over the last 50 years in the Arab region reveals a deeply-rooted tradition of civil society organisation (CSO) involvement in literacy and adult education. There are two main motives behind such involvement. One is religious, especially for Muslims who are encouraged by the Islamic faith to learn and help others to learn; the other motive is political, as historically Arab communities were suspicious of the type of educational institutions that were introduced into their societies.

In some countries the first-ever organised effort against illiteracy was initiated by a CSO. A striking example from Bahrain relates to organised activities in the field of literacy and adult education started by the Bahrain Young Women Association in the 1930s. The Association managed to mobilise the entire nation into a campaign for combating illiteracy. The momentum was maintained by a number of non-governmental organisations and the private sector until 1973 when the Ministry of Education was charged with the responsibility for literacy and adult education. There is no doubt that each and every country in the region has a similar story to tell.

The contribution of CSOs to literacy and adult education is very wide indeed, ranging from the mobilisation of resources, to teaching and supervising classes, negotiating with donors, the training of instructors, and providing support to poor families. All the national reports assert the valuable and, to some, indispensable role of CSOs in helping programmes to achieve their objectives. This conviction is reflected to varying degrees in programme strategies as well as implementation. The following examples illustrate the involvement of these organisations.

There are some 600 NGOs in Egypt involved in literacy and adult education. Some work in cooperation with the government, others work independently. According to one source, a new participatory literacy paradigm has emerged in the NGO sector, which neither regards illiteracy as simply a deficit nor speaks of eradicating illiteracy. The acquisition and use of literacy is viewed as part of a long-term process in which a community or a society seeks to effect its own cultural and social transformation.

Thousands of NGOs are involved in education in general, and literacy and adult education in particular, in **Sudan**. An important player is Sudan Learning Organisation (SOLO), one of whose outstanding contributions is the “Building Literacy” post-literacy project. Its main objective is to build literacy through discussion among learners and through writing of what they discuss. The key strengths of the project are its use of imaginative texts, its employment of well-trained facilitators, and its use of distance learning techniques.

There is no doubt that CSOs have an important advantage over government departments in that they can be more flexible in managing their activities; their members are highly motivated; and they have a relatively wide margin for innovation.

There is a wide spectrum of CSOs, including trade unions, professional associations, students’ unions, women’s groups and political parties. Every country in the region has a group of CSOs working independently or in partnership with government agencies. They also work closely with regional and international donors who seem to be attracted by their efficiency and sense of innovation and accountability. But like government departments, CSOs need more substantial support from all sources.

Evaluation

This is another weakness in the organisational structure of literacy and adult education in all countries in the region. No country report has presented a detailed policy or plan for programme evaluation. Evaluation seems to be done on a regular basis only when it is required by a donor or a sponsor with regard to a specific programme or project. For the rest of the programmes, evaluation is intermittent and mostly very pedestrian. An evaluation culture for literacy and adult education in those countries is lacking. The reasons, as reflected in the national reports, include:

- the absence of clearly-stated programme goals and expected outcomes;
- the lack of any standard-setting mechanism to measure quality;
- the lack of clearly-designed benchmarks to measure achievement in various elements specific to literacy and adult education. Such elements include the varying duration of courses, the costs of teaching staff (paid or volunteers), and the rate of drop-out and repetition;
- the lack of adequate reliable data on budgets and expenditure, and on the quality of what is being offered; and
- the lack of sufficiently trained staff to carry out the task of evaluation.

Limitations and constraints

The most important limitation pointed out in nearly all the national reports is the lack of adequate financial resources. Other limitations relate to the degree of relevance or attraction of programmes to learners, while others stem from the lack of coordination between the various actors in the field.

On one hand it is claimed that literacy and adult education do not receive sufficient attention at government level (Yemen). However, sometimes the very machinery of government in administering campaigns and programmes can present a major hurdle. Complicated procedures and routines are a source of much frustration, as is the lack of coordination between various institutions (Jordan). Poor collaboration and consultation between the Ministry of Education and other Government departments over planning and evaluation have hampered the national effort in the campaign against illiteracy in Mauritania. The dysfunctioning of consultative institutions such as the National Council on Literacy in Mauritania is cited as cause for concern.

Although regional programmes can be decentralised, they are not always given the necessary means to achieve their stated objectives. This can result in inadequate facilities and equipment at the district level, as remarked by Yemen.

The lack of trained and qualified human resources is also a limiting factor in what can be achieved. This is pertinent not only in relation to field staff, but also to administrative staff. The educational level of teachers, it is claimed in Yemen, is not sufficiently high, particularly in rural areas. The national report of Mauritania talks of the lack of both quantity and quality of personnel who can accomplish the mission of the Directorate of Literacy.

Poor motivation among the target groups may lead to low success rates in campaigns. Moreover, in an environment dominated by an oral culture, this is far more likely (Morocco). Syria suggests that while public indifference or lack of awareness alone that may be a hindrance to joining literacy and adult education classes, the lack of financial means on the part of some learners is a real impediment.

The conflict in **Palestine** has damaged the physical and political infrastructure severely, and the development of adult education has been badly affected.

Main conclusions

1. The region has made some progress towards achieving primary education, especially for girls, and towards increasing the literacy rate for adults. But there are still more than six million children out of school and over 60 million adults illiterate, two thirds of whom are women. Serious effort is needed to improve the quantity and the quality of what is being provided today, particularly in poorer countries and in countries with large numbers of non-literates.
2. Only one country in the region is likely to achieve the EFA goals; 11 countries are in an intermediate position and four countries are far from the EFA goals. The concept of literacy which has prevailed in the region for decades is narrow and limited to the acquisition of the 3Rs; and adult education is often treated as either synonymous with basic literacy or with the post-literacy stage. There has been no discussion in the national reports of the term “adult learning”, possibly because the term is not known in the region.
3. Political commitment in the vast majority of the countries falls far short of providing what is required in terms of resources for implementing the national programme.
4. The national reports illustrate very clearly a pattern among policy planners of underestimating what it actually takes to put together a viable national plan to deal with an issue as complex issue as literacy. Added to this, there is the prevailing lack in understanding of the serious impact of illiteracy on individuals and on societies in a globalised world.
5. Strategies in most of the countries claim to follow a dual-track approach: dealing with adult literacy and the universalisation of primary education at the same time. This is a progressive notion that has proved difficult to implement as adult literacy has remained the poor relation of the system. Another claim relates to the linking of literacy and adult education to development sectors. This is happening in a few countries but the common practice is that of “stand-alone” literacy. The tendency in most countries is to abandon mass literacy campaigns as a strategy. However, the strategies underline a strong commitment to the education of those who have dropped out of school, out-of-school children and women, who are all considered high-priority target groups.
6. All of the national reports agree that the quality of provision is generally low. There are various reasons given. Some relate to the social and economic conditions of learners; but the major deficit is attributed to inputs and processes, including untrained and unremunerated teachers, substandard facilities, one-size-fits-all curricula, didactic methodology, little application of ICTs, and no effective mechanisms for quality control, benchmarking or regular monitoring and evaluation. There is an increasing obsession with numbers – how many come to classes and how many stay to the end. There is not much concern about whether those who stay have really learned something, or for what purpose they use what they have learned. On the whole there is, in fact, little accountability.

7. Very few countries have succeeded in linking their programmes to one or more of the international initiatives such as MDGs, poverty reduction or Education for Sustainable Development.
8. There is no discussion in the national reports on lifelong learning as a broad governing concept that encompasses all levels of education (including adult education) which can provide multiple opportunities for individuals to review continually their knowledge, skills and competencies in a rapidly-changing labour market in a rapidly-changing world.
9. Regional cooperation is at a very low ebb at present. The regional Arab League organisations that have the mandate for overseeing collective regional efforts in the realm of education seem to be lacking the necessary resources to carry out their mission. This is unfortunate because the regional Arab Organisations such as ALECSO and ARLO, and the Islamic organisations such as ISESCO, had during the 1970s and the 1980s made a notable contribution to adult literacy and adult education. ALECSO and its subsidiary organisation ARLO must be given credit for introducing and helping to implement the Arab Strategy for Literacy and Adult Education, working in close cooperation with UNESCO at that time.

It is absolutely essential for the Arab States to come up with a plan to reinforce the capacity of ALECSO and ARLO to play their role in responding to the educational and training needs of the many millions of non-literate youth and adults in the region, particularly in countries that are unable to cope with the volume of demand on their own.

10. Financing literacy and adult education is primarily a responsibility of governments. The civil society organisations in all the countries of the region make an important contribution by mobilising support and by organising programmes under their guidance. However, the private sector's contribution is very small. All the reports confirm that what is provided is not enough.
11. There are only a few examples of innovation and good practice models in the region. However, even these are a positive sign when compared to the situation about a decade ago.
12. Proper research and studies are hard to find in the Ministries with responsibility for literacy and adult education. While many universities sponsor research and analysis in the field of literacy and adult education, very little finds its way to the desks of planners and practitioners.
13. A major gap in all the national reports is the absence of any reference to the voice of the learner. There is no evidence that learners are consulted about their educational needs, or about the relevance of what is provided in response to those needs, or about the methods and techniques used in teaching, and whether their learning has had any impact on their daily lives, and on their social and economic situation. These types of questions should be the yardstick that all providers of adult education and learning use to assess their work.

On future perspectives for ALE, eight countries made comments, most of which are broad proposals rather than concrete elements for forward planning. Brief edited extracts give a flavour of these suggestions, and are to be found in Appendix C in this Synthesis Report.

The way forward

The conclusions in the previous section are based on a review of the national reports. As stated elsewhere in this Synthesis Report, there are many important activities in adult learning in almost every country which were not reviewed in the national reports. The fact that such activities are left out (possibly inadvertently) should motivate all countries to undertake a comprehensive review of what actually exists in their country under the auspices of the public sector, the private sector or the CSOs.

There are indications of important changes in Arab societies due, partly but not exclusively, to globalisation and the massive diffusion of Information and Communication Technologies.

The education systems need to take these changes into account because they represent major challenges as well as opportunities. In order to be able to provide every citizen with an adequate foundation for acquisition of knowledge and skills throughout life, education systems will have to change the way they deal with the complex issues in educating and training youth and adults who need to live and work in rapidly-changing environments. Development in the region has not been uniform. There are countries that have suffered and are still suffering from poverty, military conflict and civil strife, resulting in the deterioration of essential services, which have left the population in want, fear and insecurity.

For these countries education has been a casualty, yet it is more than merely an investment in human capital. It is an avenue for personal safety and development. It is a matter of life and death. In this context it is sobering to read from the work of Nadine Gordimer of South Africa:

Box 1

While those of us who have been the generations of big consumers need to consume less, for more than a billion of the world's poorest people increased consumption is a matter of life and death and a basic right – the right to freedom from want. And this is not want of food and clean water alone; there are other forms of want – illiteracy, lack of technological skills: the basic qualifications for benefiting from the concept of globalisation. Illiteracy is the basis of global cultural deprivation, and it exists among great numbers of the world's population.

From it comes isolation from any of the forms of culture that are essential to the human right to develop individual potential for a full life. There can be no global culture while there are inhabitants deprived of the ability to read, to have access to the powers of the imagination released through the written word, through literature; deprived of the intellectual and spiritual bounty of libraries.

Letters to Future Generations, compiled by Federico Mayor, UNESCO, Paris 1999, p 70

To move forward, the following key areas are crucial to adult learning if it is to have a real impact on national and regional agendas for development.

Arriving at a better understanding of the meaning of literacy

At the Regional Conference on Education for All in Cairo (January 2000), Arab Ministers of Education declared that “It is impossible to imagine the development and resurgence of the Arab World without putting an end to the problem of illiteracy in all the Arab countries”. Combating illiteracy is, therefore, a high priority. The question is: what type of literacy?

There is a need to clarify the meaning of literacy and its relationship to the multiple dimensions of development. Paulo Freire, the distinguished Brazilian educator, once said that literacy alone was of no use if there was no other process which can help to lift the culture of silence.

In 1990 in Jomtien, participating countries (Arab countries included) agreed that the minimum level of education required was the provision of basic learning needs for children, youth and adults, including literacy, numeracy and problem-solving as instruments for further education and learning necessary for survival and the successful management of life and work. In Dakar (2000) a number of broad strategies were approved which included linking education to anti-poverty and development efforts; and promoting participatory and accountable systems. “Literacy education, especially post-literacy education, is apt to be more effective if it is carried out in contexts in which literacy is or could be used to improve daily life. Teaching adults to read and write is not enough, they need basic knowledge too.” (Wagner in *Literacy: an International Handbook*)

Perhaps the most enlightening statement in this context is the submission of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) to the Delors Commission which included the following:

Box 2

“The conventional notion of literacy/literate needs a thorough revision. Being able to read and write a simple statement of everyday life is not enough to prepare people to face the complexities of the modern world, much less those of the 21st century. Literacy itself is a lifelong learning process – an ever-moving target. The integration of all adult education, including general, political, cultural and vocational education into a lifelong learning perspective is essential. We must overcome false assumptions and dichotomies. We need to look at new partnerships as well as old responsibilities. Public institutions and private companies, voluntary organisations and professional associations, and initiatives in related fields have to share their experiences, and they can all give new life to adult continuing education, including research of the universities and research institutions. Competition and market forces must not prevent cooperation. Moreover, governments must provide constructive legislation and a framework of financial and logistical support which is conducive to the momentous tasks of the next decades which will see more adults living in this world than ever before.”

(ICAE, 1994)

A school of thought shared by a number of specialists takes the view that there are multiple literacies and not one single autonomous literacy. There are at least three different meanings that people attribute to the notion of multiple literacies, including the use of the metaphor of literacy, taking it from literacy as reading and writing and applying it to things like computer literacy, political literacy ...” (Street, in *UIE Education* No. (9) 1991)

For the Arab region, the focus should be the role of literacy in development which requires the individual to be an active actor in literacy learning, not just a passive recipient of an externally-

defined and introduced technique. The proposed approach will have implications for literacy planning and operations, particularly for literacy methodology which must shift from the pre-fixed model of primer to a model in which the learner is involved throughout the different stages of the programme, from design to evaluation.

Literacy, however, is a tool that can open a number of channels for the individual to be more consciously involved in their personal life and the life of their community. It should, therefore, be conceived as the first step in a continuum of learning that grows with the length and the breadth of life.

Box 3

Adult literacy, an essential element in overall development, must be closely linked to economic and social priorities and to present and future manpower needs. All efforts should therefore tend towards functional literacy. Rather than an end to itself, literacy should be regarded as a way of preparing man for a social, civic, and economic role that goes far beyond the limits of rudimentary literacy training consisting merely in the teaching of reading and writing.

Literacy teaching should be resolutely oriented towards development, and should be an integral part not only of any national education plans but also of plans and projects for development in all sectors of the national life. In view of mankind's needs today, education can no longer be confined to the school; the necessary promotion of adult literacy makes it essential to integrate all the school and out-of-school resources of each country.

Functional literacy for adults must, moreover, involve the whole of society and not governments only. It demands the co-operation of all the forces in the nation and, in particular, local authorities and communities, educational, scientific and cultural bodies, public and private enterprises, non-governmental organisations, political groups, religious movements, women's organisations, and so on.

(Statement issued in 1965 following a World Congress of Ministers of Education on the eradication of illiteracy, meeting at Tehran under the auspices of UNESCO.)

J. Lowe, *The Education of Adults. A World Perspective*, UNESCO Press, 1982 (p. 98)

Dealing with illiteracy, particularly in the less financially prosperous countries of the Arab States region, is a serious undertaking that requires the highest level of political commitment and the highest level of professionalism within a forward-looking strategy – a lifelong learning strategy.

From literacy to lifelong learning

Lifelong learning defines a broad set of aims and strategies around the central tenet that a key attribute of modern society is the availability of learning opportunities over the whole lifespan, accessible on a widespread basis. It is understood to mean the continuation of learning throughout the lifespan. One has the opportunity to return to formal educational institutions and to non-formal learning that is consciously planned and systematised (OECD, *Lifelong learning for All*). The challenge to the curriculum is to develop long-term self-sustaining study skills and habits.

For these reasons, and because of the need to find a conceptual framework that can include the diversity of activities under the variety of terminologies ranging from formal education, literacy

to adult education and to non-formal education and tertiary education, the countries of the Arab region are advised to adopt lifelong learning as a concept that can encapsulate the whole range. In any case, it is a concept that is indigenous to the region with its roots going back more than 14 centuries in history as illustrated by the sayings of Prophet Mohamed who asked his followers to “seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.” Arab culture and Arab societies hold knowledge in high esteem.

What characterises all societies today is the increasing diversity of settings in which learning takes place, and the diversity of demand for learning opportunities tailored to meet individual interests, aspirations and needs. The Delors Commission concluded that education in the 21st century stands on four pillars:

- learning to know;
- learning to do;
- learning to live together; and
- learning to be.

These are certainly the cornerstones of the system of education in any country. The need for the developing countries (Arab States included) to comply with the concept inherent in these four pillars is more pressing than it is in the industrialised countries. But it is the industrialised countries of the OECD who have gone a long way in the application of the vision and the concept proposed by the Delors Commission on Lifelong Learning.

The main challenge, according to M. Delors, is how can we make the transition to lifelong learning, which implies changing formal education systems and ending the division between initial and adult education in favour of a continuous learning process. “In our view, lifelong learning makes it possible to give order to different educational sequences, to manage transitions, to diversify and personalise individual paths to learning and to provide second or third chances.” (Delors, *Learning Throughout Life*, UNESCO, 2002)

The reference to lifelong learning in the Arab States national reports appears to be incomplete and – in some cases – even out of context. It is high time that it received some serious consideration by policy-makers.

Training literacy and adult education personnel

The shortage in the region of professionally-trained personnel for literacy and adult education is a constraint that appears in every national report. Adult education in the Arab States region is yet to be recognised as a profession with a visible and attractive career structure. There is unanimity among all the national reports that literacy and adult education teachers have to be trained, well paid and given the necessary ancillary staff who can take care of routine work. If adult education services (including adult literacy) are to be expanded, the administrative, organising and teaching force will have to be expanded too. It must, however, be noted that the training of adult education personnel is complex because of its heterogeneous nature, involving a wide range of providers and clientele. The minimum requirement is to achieve as much of a common core as possible. Once that is achieved, other training cycles should be planned to help reinforce staff capacity. Some particular kinds of adult education programmes, however, will certainly require specialised knowledge and unique skills.

The training of part-time teachers is difficult to arrange, as most of them are already committed to full-time employment and enjoy little free time. They will have to be given a powerful incentive to participate in training programmes. In some of the national reports, reference is made to the role of universities and teacher training institutes in training adult education personnel. It goes without saying that this should be a key area of engagement for both universities and teacher training institutes. There are many models in Arab universities and a great variety of models in countries around the world, particularly in Asia and Africa. Some universities tackle the issue through their departments of university extension or through their faculties of education, while many teacher training institutes include an adult education component in their curricula.

If a country decides to opt for a lifelong learning strategy that will end “the division between initial and Adult Education in favour of a continuous learning process” according to M. Delors, then the need will arise for a new generation of teachers.

Box 4

The report prepared by UNESCO for the Tokyo Conference pointed out that:

Lifelong education with its goal of adaptability to change stresses the need for a very different type of teacher – and not only where adult education is concerned. It is no longer a question of teaching or educating from the front of the class but of helping to learn, of providing motivation, of stimulating the acquisition of knowledge and creativeness, of knowing how to fade into the background at the right moment, of encouraging self-directed learning, which is now perhaps more important than the specific knowledge they impart. Educators must be prepared to understand the model to which their own behaviour corresponds, and be willing to accept the existence of other models. Adults no longer need masters and lecturers so much as advisers and animators. Educators must know how to communicate with the learner. In a word, the abilities and qualities necessary for all those engaged in Adult Education and hence the key points on which their training should concentrate may be summed up as follows: (a) a knowledge of those being taught and of their environment; (b) competence in the elements which make up the programme content; (c) an ability to utilize the most appropriate methods, and (d) psycho-sociological training, training in communication in particular.’

Report prepared by UNESCO and quoted in J. Lowe, *The Education of Adults ...*, p. 153.

Building partnership

If a society believes that education is a human right and that providing access to education for all citizens is the responsibility of the entire society, then all providers must work together in partnership. It is obvious that the major responsibility in all the countries of the Arab States region falls on the shoulders of the public sector; but civil society organisations have always been fully involved in providing education for youth and adults. Some of these organisations are women’s organisations; others are teachers’ unions, students’ unions and charity organisations. Their contributions vary in quality and in volume from one country to the other. It is proportionately far less than that of the public sector but nevertheless it has in many cases proved to be more effective and quite innovative. These organisations need financial and logistical support from government and from inter-governmental organisations. Some of them have succeeded in attracting support from external donors in a number of countries. The relationship between the national civil society organisations and government is sometimes marred by tensions

or suspicions. The reason is certainly political as some of these organisations follow a political line which is, in a number of situations, different from that of the government. This is a worldwide phenomenon. However, in the Arab Region this phenomenon has its roots in history that goes back to the colonial past when non-governmental organisations were the *avant-garde* of the national movements for independence. They worked closely with the national political parties. They see their involvement in education as part of their mission to work for justice and human rights.

It is absolutely essential for these organisations and the public sector as well as for the private sector (which is doing very little at the moment) to work together for the sake of creating in every country in the region a strong partnership that can serve the diversity of learners among youth and adults.

Gender and equity

Despite the impressive progress that the region has made in the education of girls and the empowerment of women, the situation leaves a lot to be desired. Some 60 per cent of women in the region are non-literate and only in two-fifths of the countries has gender parity in education been achieved. Some of the constraints that hinder progress are deeply rooted in traditions and misconceptions about the status of women in society and require special political and economic measures. Providing learning opportunities for girls and women is imperative, but motivating them to take advantage of those opportunities depends on the readiness of society to see them do so, and on the relevance of what is being provided to respond to their needs as equal citizens.

In nearly all the countries of the region, particularly in rural areas, social, cultural, religious and economic factors combine to create barriers, placing girls and women at a serious disadvantage. Removing all of those barriers will take a long time. One way to accelerate change could be the use of ICTs in education and in cultural awareness programmes. Women, particularly those in rural areas, can benefit from distance learning if a viable system can be put in place for that purpose. Education and training are key dimensions in efforts to enable women to participate more effectively in development. What is required now is for governments to adopt holistic approaches to the gender issue, starting with creating an enabling environment based on three critical dimensions:

- access to opportunities and resources;
- ability to participate in decision-making processes; and
- participation in political institutions.

An enabling environment for women's participation in development will take into account, *inter alia*, the fields of education, health and work. These three areas are crucial to women's effective participation in development.

The experience of some countries around the world indicates that where there is full and equal participation of women in public life and decision-making, the implementation of their rights improves. On the other hand, the need exists in some countries in the region, particularly in rural areas and in situations of armed conflict, to create an enabling environment for all children, in order to ensure the security and to protect the human rights of not only girls, but all children.

Specific challenges related to gender issues are exacerbated by the limited capabilities of most of the governments in the region to perform qualitative analysis, develop monitoring indicators, and collect reliable data (qualitative and quantitative).

Target groups

In view of the global challenges and opportunities facing the design, delivery and administration of education to meet diverse national and individual needs, particularly in the context of globalisation and the transition of economies from an industrial base to a knowledge base, all countries, but particularly the developing countries, have to adopt policies that can enhance capacity to provide more opportunities for education for all, better quality education both formal and non-formal. Needless to say, any country in the Arab region, rich or poor, will require new policies, strategies and delivery mechanisms to provide education and training to a huge and diverse population with very varied learning goals and styles.

If we leave aside the privileged groups of citizens who enter the formal system of education and manage to survive to the end, there is in each country of the region a number of citizens who have been either left out of the formal system of education for a variety of reasons, or have not been able to get the maximum that the system could offer. Such categories of citizens include:

- non-literate youth and adults;
- out-of-school youth and those who have dropped out of school;
- women and girls;
- geographically isolated communities (e.g. rural population) and the socially groups (e.g. ethnic minorities);
- immigrants and refugees;
- people with disabilities;
- prison inmates;
- the wide spectrum of professionals who need to review and update their knowledge and skills; and
- house-bound mothers.

The use of ICTs in adult learning

The present education systems are obviously not equipped to deal with these demands either quantitatively or qualitatively, not to mention the numerous constraints of time and place of learning and the cost involved. While the use of ICTs to reinforce the education and training of all these categories is absolutely indispensable, it is by no means a panacea, or a magic wand for solving all problems. ICTs have the potential to enhance several learning objectives:

- Expanding access to all levels of education;
- Improving the quality of education;
- Facilitating non-formal education;
- Providing a variety of options for leisure and cultural events.

As well as the role they can play in advocacy, public awareness and the ability to reach those who are excluded through traditional structures of education, ICTs have the potential to:

- Reduce the isolation many adult literacy providers and students experience;
- Facilitate communication among staff and students within and between programmes;
- Increase access to high-quality materials and emerging research;

- Streamline administrative and reporting processes; and
- Help to provide the delivery vehicle for innovative instructional and staff development approaches.

With regard to the education of out-of-school youth, which is another high priority target group in the region, ICTs can enhance the work of different institutions in the domain of vocational and business skills, competency-based training and alternate path to higher education (Haddad and Draxler).

Research and development

Recommendations

On concepts and understandings of literacy and adult learning and education

A major issue that the region should resolve is the confusion which exists in nearly all countries regarding the understanding of literacy, adult education, lifelong learning and non-formal education. Literacy is used by all countries in the limited traditional narrow sense of acquiring the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy. Adult education is also considered by most countries as synonymous with literacy; and non-formal education is used by some countries to refer to the setting and context of learning, and occasionally to activities that take place outside the formal system. However, lifelong learning has not been defined or operationally discussed in any of the national reports.

The lack of clarity and precision in using these terms has had a negative impact on the way policies and strategies are designed. It is, therefore, necessary to rethink these definitions.

On policy

Adult education (including adult literacy) has not gained the recognition it deserves in terms of visibility, prioritisation and resources. States in the region should review the status of adult education as a necessary component of their economic development policy.

Adult Learning and Education (ALE) should be treated as an integral part of the national plan for education and development within the framework of lifelong learning, and should enjoy high priority in terms of financing.

On strategy

Strategies for literacy and adult education should be designed as an integrated part of the national strategy for education with clearly-defined objectives and outcomes.

Governments should set up more effective mechanisms to ensure effective partnership among various providers of ALE.

Make a commitment to build the capacity of civil society organisations who are partners in ALE programmes.

On the quality of provision

There is a need to introduce quality assurance mechanisms and a system of accreditation with regard to the activities of all providers of literacy and adult education. More specifically, literacy and adult education programmes badly need improvement in curricula and content to move away from a one-size-fits-all model to a learner-centred approach; an overhauling of the staffing situation to ensure that both administrative and teaching personnel are professionally trained and adequately remunerated; and the adoption of efficient monitoring and evaluation systems.

Each country should establish a database that will provide the necessary source of information required for planning, monitoring, evaluation and decision-making.

On the use of ICTs in literacy

Applying ICTs in literacy and adult education programmes will help to accelerate the rate of progress and will contribute to the quality of the programmes.

Adopt a policy for the use of Information and Communication Technologies in ALE.

On priorities

Women, those who have dropped out of school and youth, the rural population, the poor, minorities and the disabled should be high on the priority list. Programmes should be an instrument not simply to help them become literate, but also to help them improve their social and economic situations – as Paulo Freire said, “to be able to read the world” and to be able to carry out their role as active citizens.

Governments should take the necessary technical and administrative measures to ensure the equitable access to education and training of girls, women and all disadvantaged groups in society.

Make available at community level a variety of publications and reading materials for neo-literates.

On financing

While the prime responsibility for financing education is that of the government, literacy and adult education should be seen as a national issue that deserves more attention of both the public and the private sectors as well as that of CSOs.

States in the region should consider literacy and adult education an urgent pre-requisite for the region’s security and stability. They should accordingly put together a fund for launching a regional initiative to liberate more than 60 million people from illiteracy, of whom two-thirds are women, and provide access and training to the estimated eight to ten million children and youth who are out-of-school. Governments should be reminded that combating illiteracy is an expensive undertaking. But to do so little about it is more expensive.

Under the umbrella of regional cooperation, Arab states should establish a special fund for supporting adult literacy and school-drop-out programmes in countries of the region, especially those undergoing reconstruction, and countries with high-levels of illiteracy.

On universities and research centres

The role of the universities in providing professional training for personnel, in conducting research and in providing extension and outreach professional training for adults and youth should form a key element in the national strategy for literacy, adult education and lifelong learning. The expansion of knowledge and the rapidly-changing demands of the labour market will make lifelong learning an indispensable requirement for Arab societies.

Research institutions must consider how literacy and adult education link with other socio-political and socio-economic aspects of development.

Universities and teacher training institutes should include the training of adult educators in their teacher training curricula.

Regional stability

The relative lack of political stability and the constant situation of military conflict in some countries of the Region have had a serious negative impact on development of the region in general and on the development of education in those countries in particular. The international community is called upon to do more for the realisation of peace and development in the region.

Expectations of CONFINTEA VI and future prospects for ALE

Expectations of CONFINTEA VI

These were expressed only in very general terms:

- to reinforce exchange of experience and good practice among countries,
- to reinforce the human capacity of countries in literacy, adult and NFE
- to develop a regional sub-system of cooperation and coordination in literacy and adult and non-formal education.

Future prospects for ALE

Seven countries made comments relating to this subject, using either the term “future” or “vision”. Some of the comments were closer to wishes than realistic forward planning.

- **Morocco** speaks about overcoming financial constraints; sensitising and mobilising potential actors; diversifying and improving the quality of programmes and increasing the tone of action.
- **Oman** hopes for the mobilisation of primary education by 2015; and would improve the quality of training for literacy instructors.
- **Egypt** will give priority to the training of women in life skills; and will work to make the curricula more adaptable to the learners’ needs.
- **Sudan** will give attention to the study of hitherto unwritten languages and to their use in teaching illiterate adults. It will, in addition, give priority to three areas of concern: improving the quality of literacy programmes; studying learners’ motivation; and educating and training youth.
- For **Tunisia**, the future will include plans to:
 - reduce the rate of illiteracy to 10% by 2009, and to 1% for youth below 30 years of age by the same date.
 - modernise and enrich the content of adult education;
 - give more support to adult education societies, and to strengthening partnerships
 - find a formula for integrating formal and non-formal education.
- **Yemen** seeks to overhaul the entire system of literacy and adult education, starting with policy and ending with evaluation.
- In **Bahrain**, the future plan for literacy and continuing education is similar to the Yemeni situation. The reader may want to consult the national reports from the two countries.

- **Kuwait** has many expectations of CONFINTEA VI. The most salient points relate to identifying and overcoming key obstacles which impede progress in literacy and adult education programmes in developing countries.
 - Increasing donors' contribution to developing countries.
 - Improving the quality of strategic studies in the field of literacy and adult education.
 - Helping countries build better data.

On the future vision, three points are proposed.

- Programmes should address society's needs.
- Establishment of a national centre for adult education.
- A better system for the exchange of experience among neighbouring countries.

Appendix A: Countries which submitted national reports

1. Algeria
2. Bahrain
3. Egypt
4. Iraq
5. Jordan
6. Kuwait
7. Lebanon
8. Mauritania
9. Morocco
10. Oman
11. Palestine
12. Qatar
13. Saudi Arabia
14. Sudan (excluding Southern Sudan)
15. Syrian Arab Republic
16. Tunisia
17. Yemen

Appendix B: Acronyms

- ALECSO Arab League Organisation for Education Culture and Science
- ARLO Arab League Literacy Organization
- OECD Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
- OSCY Out-of-School Children and Youth
- CSOs Civil Society Organisations
- EFA Education For All
- GER Gross Enrolment Rate
- GMR Global Monitoring Report (EFA)
- GPI Gender Parity Index
- ICTs Information and Communication Technologies
- ISESCO Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
- LAEO Literacy and Adult Education Organization
- MDGs Millennium Development Goals
- MENA Middle East and North Africa
- NCLAE National Council for Literacy and Adult Education
- NER Net Enrolment Rate
- NGOs Non-Governmental Organisations
- SOLO Sudan Open Learning Organization
- UNESCO United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
- UNDP United Nations Development Programme
- UNLD United Nations Literacy Decade
- UIL UNESCO Institute for Lifelong learning
- UPE Universal Primary Education

Appendix C: Selected extracts from national reports

Egypt

Expected outcomes from the Conference, and a future view for adult education:

- Establishing legislation that deepens the issues of equality and non-discrimination.
- Legislation should reflect the common interests of the different sections of society.
- Issuing the legislation which organises domestic institutions' work in adult education.
- Adult education is regarded as a common responsibility of the state and the community.
- Providing sufficient amounts for the excluded in adult education.
- The mechanisms of cooperation between the states of the South to benefit from successful experiences.
- New mechanisms of funding, depending on private work institutions, through their social role, with emphasis on the role of multi-national institutions.

Adult education programmes should emphasise age and globalisation issues, such as:

- Facing future challenges
- Critical thinking
- Adaptation to the changes of globalisation.

Kuwait

- Assess the impact of illiteracy on development in the developing countries.
- Identify constraints and limitations that literacy and adult education programmes are facing in developing countries.
- Attract funds for literacy and adult education projects.
- Introduce strategic studies for the improvement of performance in literacy and adult education programmes.
- Adopt rules and decisions that oblige countries around the world to combat illiteracy.
- Collect and store accurate statistics on illiteracy around the world.

Mauritania

- Reinforce the exchange of experience and good practice in the field of literacy among organisations and countries.
- Reinforce the human and material capacity of our countries in adult education and training and non-formal education.
- Establish a sub-regional advisory system for the exchange of experience, coordination and follow-up in adult education.

Palestine

It is quite clear that the planning process in Palestine, with reference to adult education as well as other aspects, faces many challenges to produce and especially to implement plans on local, regional and national levels. Nevertheless, Palestinians have tried to plan for their scattered communities in spite of the diverse technical and logistical difficulties facing such an endeavour. Plans produced have reflected long-standing aims to achieve prosperity and improve political

and socio-economic welfare in a well-planned and prioritised manner. Unfortunately, the plans confront numerous and diverse obstacles, most of which are attributed to practices of the consecutive Governments of Israel, especially those related to the colonisation and confiscation of more Palestinian lands. Notwithstanding, tackling planning within such a hard political and conflicting environment is a national priority to the Palestine National Authority (PNA) as it is considered an integral part of the peace process.

Physical planning under such diverse and volatile political conditions in the Palestinian territories is a fundamentally difficult task due to the many variables, uncertainties and complex issues.

The geographic separation between Gaza Strip and West Bank has made it difficult to create the kind of continuity and streamlining needed for plans to be realised and implemented on the ground with ease. Further, almost all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip towns are currently locked down and Gaza Strip is now under siege, which entails the sick being unable to receive medical treatment, ambulances being prevented from reaching their destinations and the deceased remaining unburied. In other words, the entire PNA territories are currently at a complete standstill in contravention of human rights treaties and basic humanitarian norms.

The Palestinian National Authority is doing its best to enhance its physical planning process, thereby setting the stage for ease of implementation and success, with attention to national strategy, policy and priority.

Therefore, urgent assistance is needed to realise the goals of our plans, which are directed towards raising the living conditions of the Palestinian people and improving the economic self-sufficiency of the Palestinian territories.

Saudi Arabia

- Remind countries of their commitments to the eradication of illiteracy.
- Evaluate what has been achieved so far.
- Overcome constraints that countries face in the field of education and literacy.
- Equity between males and females
- Streamline all terminologies used in literacy and adult education.
- Update statistics.
- Strengthen partnerships among actors in literacy and adult education.
- Establish an international website for exchange of information and experience
- A final declaration about commitments and follow-up.

Sudan

The Conference will be expected to discuss:

- Building national capacity for the development of policies, programmes, human resources and suitable institutions.
- Renewal of national and international commitments to combat illiteracy.
- Activating the decision of donor countries to support literacy programmes.
- Reinforcing innovative programmes and helping to bring them to scale.
- Facilitating the exchange of data for the purpose of improving policies.
- Research into and recording of non-written languages.

Appendix D: The situation in Southern Sudan

(This is an edited excerpt from a paper written by Dr. Abdelwahid Abdalla Yousif in March 2007 at the request of UNESCO)

Introduction

The national report on Sudan was confined to the Northern part of Sudan. The excuse given by the author of the report was that “no information on the situation in the South was available”.

In view of the seriousness of the problems and the challenges that the education system in general and literacy and adult education in particular are facing in the Southern part of Sudan, I decided to add this brief section on Southern Sudan using the limited sources I could lay my hands on, plus my personal knowledge of some of the aspects of what is happening there. It may be useful to look at the process of reconstruction in Southern Sudan as a model which, if successful, can be applied in other similar post-conflict situations.

Sudan is now a Federal State with a number of provinces (Wilayat) in the North and in the South. In addition, the South has its own government which looks – among many other issues – after education which is under the responsibility of a Minister for Education.

A glimpse of history

This part of the country has been devastated by a second civil war in a country lasting more than 25 years, during which the major part of the infrastructure, particularly that of education, had been destroyed. Lack of security led to a lack of stability among the population, and consequently mass migration and mass displacement were a common feature of the situation. The disruption, and sometimes the absence of regular educational services in the majority of the south, was inevitable as the national system of education was, and still is, characterised by a three-tiered decentralised system in which basic education is the responsibility of the local authorities; secondary is that of the states; and tertiary is that of the federal government. The Federal Ministry of Education (FMOE) serves as the technical body in charge of planning, policy, training, educational personnel, research, curricula development and monitoring the quality of instruction. There was very little that the FMOE or the local authorities could do in the war-stricken south, apart from limited activities in some of the few safe areas.

A new situation has now been created, thanks to the agreement that ended the civil war, signed in January 2005. Education has been declared by the government of the South, the most important priority preceded only by security. The Southern Education System is now managed by the Secretariat of Education (SOE) and through regional education offices, country education offices (CEO) and the Payams (communities).

A description of the education situation in Southern Sudan

The education sector is dramatically under-resourced and has been almost exclusively dependent on outside funding. Because of this lack of resources, most of the time administrative positions are not filled and schools are often funded and operated by parents and NGOs. More than the North, the South faces tough challenges with regard to coverage, quality and equity. Moreover, particular attention must address increasing needs with the anticipated flow of the large majority of internally-displaced persons (IDPs) into the region.

Enrolment is marked by extremely limited access, especially for girls, and particularly low quality, system-wide. The people of the Southern Sudan have the lowest access to primary education in the world; their gross enrolment ratio (20%) is the world's lowest, as is the female-to-male enrolment ratio (35%). Only 2% of the population completes primary education and the adult literacy rate is 24%. Existing schools have inadequate facilities and sanitation and are unsuitable for learning. About 38% of classes are taught outdoors, and 61% in local material structures in varying states of disrepair. Of the few schools that do exist (there is one school per 1,000 children), only 10% are in permanent buildings; 80% of schoolchildren have no bench to sit on and only one third of schools have latrines; just half have access to water; and 62% have no health facilities in the vicinity. An entire generation has missed out on education during two decades of war.

Educating this generation and its children is a massive task. The trend in enrolment is also alarming: since 1990, improvements in the rate of enrolment per year have averaged only 1.1%. For Sudan to achieve MDG 3 targets, given the current rate of enrolment, future enrolment would have to grow by at least 4.5% per year. Reducing and eventually closing the gender gap per MDG 4 remains one of the most difficult challenges in Southern Sudan. It is estimated that girls account for only 27% of total enrolment.

Policy is guided by the principles that education shall be the right of every child; be accessible to any citizen of Sudan; achieve equality, including gender equality, through awareness-raising; foster nation-building through integration, peace, self-reliance, patriotism and promoting respect and tolerance for other cultures, traditions, opinions and beliefs; and promote national socio-economic sustainable development. Although a curriculum has been developed for basic education, many schools are still using a foreign curriculum (from Uganda and Kenya) that is often culturally irrelevant – this is assumed to contribute to the high drop-out rate. There exists no unified secondary school curriculum, syllabus or examination. Most schools continue to follow the curricula of neighbouring countries. Textbook availability is an issue throughout the South and there is currently no textbook production capacity.

Currently, there are approximately 1,800 schools; 33 of these are secondary schools with an estimated enrolment of 8,000 students. As such, the number of secondary education graduates is insufficient compared to the need for new teachers alone.

Only an estimated 6% of teachers are qualified. Their remuneration is unpredictable, with 89% of school PTAs reporting paying teachers a maximum rate of \$ 90 annually. Teacher absenteeism is high and the academic year is often short. In Bahr el Ghazal, the recorded average school year is only six months. Moreover, training opportunities are limited to short-term training courses provided by NGOs.

Existing capacity in management and administration is limited, as much of the education system was destroyed and did not function properly during the war, and now continues to be under-resourced. The sector does not possess an adequate, functioning system to assess quality, outcomes and resources. There is limited information as to what constitutes achievement of outcomes and limited baseline data to measure programme and intervention efficacy.

(Source: *The UN Joint Assessment Mission (Jam Sudan)*, March 2005 Volume III, pp 161–167 and pp 171–172.)

A vision for the future in Southern Sudan

According to the UN Joint Assessment Mission (2005), the Secretariat of Education is “fully committed to meeting the EFA targets and MDGs by 2015. It believes that these goals are a fair reflection of the aspirations of the people of Southern Sudan and can be achieved if there is full commitment at every level, including the international community.” (See *Joint Mission Report*, p 174)

The SOE is hoping that by 2011, the following will be achieved:

- Enrolment in Primary School will be raised from 20% in 2003 to 55%.
- Enrol 15% of out-of-school youth in alternative education systems.
- Improve the quality of basic education and make education contextually and culturally relevant.
- Increasing girls’ primary enrolment from 11% to 40% of the out-of-school age group.
- Increasing the number of village schools for girls to more than 3000 by 2011.
- Provide a cumulative 15% of adults with access to literacy campaigns over the six-year period, with a focus on young women.

The list of priorities within the education sector included the following statement: “Complete the development of accelerated learning opportunities for young people and adults who are now beyond the age of normal entry to basic education and to develop a plan for the establishment of vocational training centers for out-of-school youths, including demobilised soldiers. A comprehensive examination of a more technical vocational education system should be undertaken in this phase.” (See *Joint Mission Report*, p 177)

A future vision for the Sudan as a whole

The basic components of the Sudanese government national policies on education have, since the 1990s, echoed the recommendations of the international conferences, such as Jomtien (1990) and Dakar (2000). Such policies include access to quality basic education for all children aged 6–13 by 2015, the elimination of gender disparities and the improvement of educational quality for disadvantaged groups. To achieve those goals, the government is relying on both public and private education sectors.

Although the education system is poorly funded with expenditure at only 1% of GDP, compared with other sub-Saharan African countries where expenditure on education is 3% – 5% of GDP, Sudan’s basic education system, according to the Joint Assessment Mission Report, has gradually reduced gender disparities over the years, maintained a high survival rate to sixth grade and has relatively low unit costs. (*Joint Mission Report*, p 165, volume III)

However, one should remember that there is wide disparity among the different states. For example in 2003, while the GER for Northern Sudan was 62%, the highest enrolments were in Northern State (100%), River Nile (86%) and El Gazira (84%). The lowest was in South Darfur (33%).

With reference to gender, while it is true to say that the overall gender disparities are not so wide, gender issues in certain states and communities continue to pose a major challenge. Both supply and demand factors hinder girls’ participation in primary education. In sparsely populated areas

long distances to school make parents particularly concerned for the safety of their daughters. Some of the other factors that hinder girls' education include:

- The belief among some parents, especially in rural communities, that girls do not need education, at least not beyond the basic level.
- Early marriages (starting at 12 years of age) in some communities.
- The high level of adult illiteracy particularly among women.

In addition to the issue of girls' education, the government has, in its future strategies to deal with marginalised groups such as ethnic minorities, nomads, out-of-school children, demobilised child soldiers, and the disabled.

In response to the demands imposed by the Peace Agreement which has put both North and South Sudan on a six-year interim period for the application of certain components of the agreement, the Federal Government is hoping that by the year 2011 it will make major progress towards the achievement of universal primary education and gender equality. This means that the GER will have to progress from its current rate of 62% to about 88% by 2011, and the access rate to grade one should increase from 75% currently to about 90%.

The Joint Assessment Mission Report underlines the fact that "in addition to basic education programmes, the FMOE operates special needs and Television Education Programmes. Special needs programmes target adult literacy and non-formal education for out-of-school children, especially among nomads, Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and refugees ... Adult Literacy will be of great assistance in achieving education goals for children in low enrolment areas." (*Joint Mission Report*, p 168 Volume III)

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