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Global Meeting on Literacy and Sustainable Societies

UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, France, 8-9 September 2015

Paris Communiqué on Literacy and Sustainable Societies



I. Preamble

1. We, the Vice President, the Minister of Education, senior officials of countries and local governments, representatives of multilateral organizations, of regional organizations, of bilateral donors, of civil society organizations, of the private sector and individual experts, teachers and learners, have gathered here at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France, for the Global Meeting on ‘Literacy and Sustainable Societies’ on 8 and 9 September 2015 on the occasion of International Literacy Day.
2. We met at a critical moment of global education and development agenda-setting for the next 15 years. We recognize the centrality of literacy and its crucial role to achieve the vision of the Incheon Declaration: Education 2030, endorsed at the World Education Forum in May 2015 in the Republic of Korea, ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’. This vision should be an integral part of the 2030 global agenda for sustainable development that will be adopted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit later this month.
3. We, therefore, warmly welcome the focus of the 2015 celebrations of International Literacy Day and this Global Meeting on Literacy and Sustainable Societies, which has highlighted the complex interrelations between literacy and sustainable development.
4. Literacy, as part of education – which is a fundamental human right inscribed in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – is a driver for sustainable development. At the same time, progress in each area of sustainable development will contribute to the advancement of literate environments, creating sustained demands, opportunities and conducive settings for people to acquire, use and further develop their literacy skills.
5. We appreciate the concerted efforts made by governments, civil society, the private sector, cities and development partners, resulting in some positive changes in the literacy landscape since 2000. More children are participating in learning, within which literacy is an essential component, and our world has 50 million fewer illiterate adults than 15 years ago.
6. We are deeply concerned, however, with the scale of challenges that lie ahead of us. As a consequence of slow and uneven progress, 757 million adults, two-thirds of whom are women, lack literacy skills. Other marginalized groups such as ethnic and linguistic minorities, people with disabilities, people in rural areas and out-of-school children are also dramatically over-represented. At least 250 million children of primary school age are likely to enter adulthood without the functional literacy skills needed to participate fully in society.
7. Efforts to address these challenges are hampered by the fragmentation and unevenness of provision and the focus on supply-driven approaches that have often neglected the voices of learners and the demands from different development sectors; the lack of policy attention and resources; and the absence of strong connections between literacy and lifelong learning opportunities. Cycles of illiteracy and education of poor quality perpetuate socio-economic inequalities and disparities of opportunity and threaten the sustainability of societies. This is not the world we want.
8. We, therefore, reaffirm our engagement to literacy as the foundation of lifelong learning. The emerging ‘2030 vision of literacy’ is a continuum of proficiency levels and is part of a wider set of key competencies needed for sustainable development.

II. Strategic Directions: Translating the ‘2030 vision of literacy’ into action

9. During this Global Meeting on ‘Literacy and Sustainable Societies’, we identified some key issues and some strategic directions to be taken forward in the years to come, notably:
 - a. **Ensuring equitable access to quality literacy learning opportunities as a crucial foundation of lifelong learning:** Quality, responsive and gender-sensitive literacy learning should be promoted for all age groups in all countries, prioritizing disadvantaged groups. Literacy learning, whether acquired in formal, non-formal or informal settings, should be recognized through frameworks for the recognition, validation and accreditation of prior and acquired knowledge and skills. More qualified, skilled and motivated teachers, facilitators and other professionals should be made available, especially in non-formal education.
 - b. **Allocating adequate and sustainable financial resources:** Responsible authorities, such as governments, states, local authorities and municipalities, according to constitutional provisions, as well as development partners, civil society and the private sector, should mobilize adequate and sustainable resources within the framework of the Incheon Declaration, in light of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, and beyond.
 - c. **Encouraging innovative approaches to the teaching and learning of literacy:** While building and scaling-up proven effective approaches is critical, new opportunities must be seized to improve curriculum frameworks and teaching and learning processes. The potential of information and communication technologies should be harnessed to make learning more accessible and relevant to learners and their communities, including by building conducive learning environments and providing appropriate learning resources.
 - d. **Enriching the knowledge base, monitoring and assessment:** More efforts are needed to strengthen interdisciplinary research capacity and to connect researchers, practitioners and policy-makers. Further investment in monitoring and information systems is required. Credible, direct and affordable literacy assessments should be established in collaboration with teachers, families, communities, and civil society with a view to enhancing learners’ motivation, the quality of teaching and learning, and policy-making.
 - e. **Building robust lifelong learning systems and partnerships:** The ‘2030 vision of literacy’ implies that literacy is integral to lifelong learning systems and related institutional and legislative frameworks. The immense task before us requires the pooling of resources for the development and coordination of joint programmes, and sustained inter-sectoral efforts of multiple stakeholders at global, regional, national and sub-national levels. This requires capacity development of stakeholders and the strengthening and widening of networks and partnerships for literacy.
 - f. **Enhancing demand for literacy:** Stronger advocacy is required to raise awareness among learners, communities, policy-makers and actors in all development sectors of the importance of literacy and literate environments for the future. Learners’ voices must be heard and their needs must be addressed. Working together across sectors will generate demands for literacy, as progress in any area of sustainable development requires literacy skills and such progress creates new demands.

III. Ways Forward

10. This Global Meeting marks the beginning of a critical process to achieve our ‘2030 vision of literacy’ that builds on the achievements and lessons learnt and seeks to develop innovations for the future.
11. Acknowledging the catalytic and coordination role of UNESCO in advancing the global literacy agenda, as specified in the United Nations Resolution on ‘Literacy for life: shaping future agendas’ (A/RES/69/141), we welcome and strongly support the proposal to create a **Global Alliance for Literacy, within the framework of lifelong learning**. The alliance should be articulated with the broader coordination mechanism for Education 2030 with a view to reaffirming the centrality of literacy as a key driver for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and to providing strategic direction and momentum to our collective efforts in the years to come.
12. A world in which everyone can achieve relevant and recognized literacy skills is within reach. During this Global Meeting, we have made a step forward to connect literacy and sustainability. We call on others to join us in building awareness and political will to pursue, together, the emerging ‘2030 vision of literacy’ in order to strengthen the foundations for an inclusive, equitable, peaceful and sustainable humanity. This is the world we want.