

Processes, outcomes, and issues

**Report and analysis of the preparatory meeting for Africa
CONFINTEA VI**

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Abstract

This report analyzes the Africa regional preparatory conference for CONFINTEA V1 in terms of processes, outcomes, and issues. The conference is part of a global process addressing issues related to adult learning. The final outcome document produced by the conference includes recommendations and actions in five key areas: policy, training, inclusion, participation, and monitoring tools. This report is meant to inform people and organizations that have an interest in adult education, but who did not attend the conference. It should give a clear overview of what the conference was about, how information was processed, and what the outcomes and issues are.

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Introduction

The preparatory meeting for Africa CONFITEA VI was part of a series of regional meetings organized around the world to prepare for the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFITEA VI), which will take place May 2009 in Brazil. The conference in Brazil will focus on three major objectives:

1. To push forward the recognition of adult learning and education as an important element of and factor conducive to lifelong learning, of which literacy is the foundation;
2. To highlight the crucial role of adult learning and education for the realization of current international education and development agendas (EFA, MDGs, UNLD, LIFE, and DESD);
3. To renew political momentum and commitment and to develop the tools for implementation in order to move from rhetoric to action. (CONFITEA VI Conference program, p. 2).

The regional preparatory conferences focus on their regional specific issues in adult learning. The theme of the African regional meeting was 'The power of Youth and Adult learning for Africa's development'.

This report analyzes the Africa regional preparatory conference for CONFITEA VI in terms of processes, outcomes, and issues. It is meant to inform people and organizations that have an interest in adult education, but who did not attend the conference. It should give a clear overview of what the conference was about, how information was processed, and what the outcomes and issues are. Most of the information used in this paper comes from documents handed out during the conference in Nairobi. Other sources are separately acknowledged.

Process

The global process

The Africa regional preparatory conference is the most recent step in the process of collaborative conferences, thematic meetings, reviews, research-based evidence collection, and networking. This process includes the efforts of many stakeholders (UNESCO Member States, United Nations agencies and international development partners, civil society, research institutions, and the private sector) and will culminate in a global conference, CONFITEA VI in Brazil, May 2009.

The Africa regional conference produced a 'Final Outcome Document' which included recommendations for action. This document will feed into the global CONFITEA VI working document or Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE). Final Outcome Documents from the four other regional conferences will likewise feed into the CONFITEA VI working document as show in Figure 1.

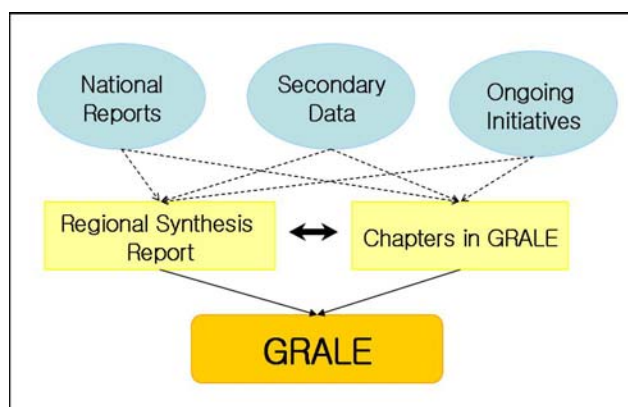


Figure 1 Overview of the information that will feed into the GRALE (UIL, 2008a)

The recommendations of the regional conferences should be translated into national strategies and serve as a basis to ensure the follow-up to the regional conference and implementation at both national and regional levels.

The major output of CONFINTEA VI will be a global 'Framework for Action', including key strategies/recommendations and benchmarks. It should, however, be kept in perspective that the result of this conference is advisory to and not binding upon governments. Political will and resource availability remain important issues for the implementation of these recommendations, as will be shown in this paper.

The Africa regional conference process

The country reports and draft summary report

The country reports are a major source of input for the global and regional conferences. They will also supply critical data for the GRALE (UIL 2008b). It is therefore important that the country reports have accurate and relevant information. In order to gain the necessary data about Adult Learning and Education (ALE) from the country reports, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) supplied a framework for the country reports:

- 1) Politics, legislation and financing;
- 2) Quality of Adult Learning and Education: Provision, Participation and Achievement;
- 3) Research, Innovation and Good Practice;
- 4) Adult Literacy;
- 5) Expectations of CONFINTEA VI and future perspectives for ALE.

Despite the guidelines provided, not all country reports provided data, or could provide only limited data, on the topics requested. The paucity of data in some reports as compared to others is reflected by the significant variation in the length of the reports. Length varied from five pages (Guinea-Bissau) and seven pages (Côte d'Ivoire) to 52 pages (Senegal) and 97 pages (Nigeria). Some countries, such as Central African Republic, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire, reported that certain information was not available or stated that they did not have access to certain information

pertaining to the activities of NGOs and/or the private sector. Another challenge reported was that ALE efforts were dispersed throughout several different government ministries, which made it difficult to compile the information needed.

The quality of country reports was also influenced by the amount of analysis or criticism provided as the reporters reflected on their own data. Some country reports provided insightful commentary on the effectiveness of their own situations, while most others reported only facts, leaving the analysis to those who summarized the country reports. The Senegal country report, for example, offered qualitative analysis and stated the implications of ALE's current stability, within the political structures that oversee ALE. The Cameroon country report mentions the lack of synergy resultant from the isolated manner in which the departments of a particular ministry function despite the existence of a coordinating committee. Such insights help in generalization, while their absence requires others to make their own generalizations based on limited insight.

A variable that influenced the ability to generalize from the country reports was the lack of standardization of terminology and concepts. The term 'adult', for example, was queried, as there appeared to be a variation in the age criteria used when gathering information pertaining to adults. A publication of UNESCO mentions that *"For most countries, adult literacy refers to programs for the 15+ age group; within that, youth literacy most frequently refers to the 15–24 age group"* (Richmond et al. 2008:10). However, during the conference some people referred to youth as being in the age group between 15 and 30 years old. In addition, the concept of 'adult education' was also queried as there were different views expressed by some in plenary as to the scope of those included in adult education programs as well as the content or curriculum of adult education programs.

Nevertheless, a draft summary of the country reports was produced by Dr. John Aitchison and Dr. Hassana Alidou. In presenting the report Aitchison stated that the variance in the amount of data provided made generalization difficult. He compared the amount of information available on some topics to a 'desert'. Despite these limitations, the plenary session applauded the effort and contribution made.

From summary report to Final Outcome Document

Each part of the draft summary report was then systematically discussed in plenary and/or parallel sessions. Each session addressed a section of the summary report, gathering feedback and incorporating contributions. The plenary sessions also included presentations and discussion on the following topics: the policies, governance structures and financing of youth and adult learning, and youth and adult learning as a resource for a participative and inclusive society.

The contextual issues, challenges, and implications in the draft summary were discussed in parallel sessions, resulting in a concise set of issues, trends, and challenges (see section Outcomes and Issues). Discussions recognized several

limitations affecting the draft Final Outcome Document. One such limitation was the variations in the country reports as mentioned above and therefore the variables introduced into the summarization and generalization processes.

The last day was dedicated to the discussion and finalization of the Final Outcome Document. Importantly, all participants were able to contribute in plenary, which facilitated a sense of group ownership of the final product. The Final Outcome Document was approved that evening.

Analysis of the process

The best measure of the success of the process is perhaps in the broad sense of ownership and consensus on the part of participants that characterized the final product. An important step in attaining ownership and consensus during the conference was the creation of an environment in which all felt free to contribute, knowing that their contribution would be respected and considered. This safe environment was facilitated by several events and attitudes such as a sincere welcome on the part of the conference organizers, verbally encouraging input from participants, and the eventual provision of microphones to those who originally had limited access. The fact that plenary and parallel session facilitators did not negatively critique participants' input encouraged further contributions. That this input was often then reflected in subsequent drafts of documents demonstrated to participants that their contributions had been considered, thereby fostering a sense of group ownership of the resultant document.

There were several challenges that influenced the process at different stages. The challenge of the variance in the country reports has already been mentioned. Logistical difficulties such as the limited access to microphones by which non-government participants could make contributions also influenced that process. That the non-government participants had limited access to microphones may have led to some frustration on their part. The conference organizers were sensitive to this and so supplied a mobile microphone which was quickly provided when a participant in the back of the room wished to be recognized. Another logistical difficulty was the time available for discussion both in plenary session and parallel session. On occasion, the time available for discussions did not seem sufficient to thoroughly discuss the issues. Though this might have again led to some frustration, the creation of a safe environment and the incorporation of a wide variety of participant contribution into the subsequent drafts more than made up for this.

It was interesting to observe that when the draft Final Outcome Document was presented some participants reacted to the way the ALE situation on the continent was represented. They expressed that they thought the picture painted in the 'general context' of the document was too bleak and several advances had been made, which did not come through in this first draft. As a result of this expressed reaction changes were made in the Final Outcome Document. However, this seemed to result in a discrepancy between the presentation of the situation in the summary report written before the conference and the Final Outcome Document

that was produced in during the conference. The Final Outcome Document seems to present some examples of successful ALE programs and/or strategies as normative, while they were only examples, if not exceptions. The impression from the country reports, as reported in the summary report is “that the challenges facing adult learning and education are massive, wide ranging and systemic” (Aitchison and Alidou 2008:2). It has to be said, however, that the Final Outcome Document also states the challenges that are there in ALE as reflected in the country reports.

Outcomes and issues

The outcomes and issues from the conference can be grouped around five key areas:

1. Policies;
2. Financing;
3. Inclusion (how to ensure conditions that enable the inclusion of marginalized groups in learning);
4. Participation (how to mobilize and motivate youth and adults to take part in learning);
5. Monitoring tools (such as reporting mechanisms and benchmarks).

These key areas are used below to report on the outcomes and issues discussed during the conference.

Policies

The country reports stated that there are several challenges in the area of policy and governance. Very few countries have comprehensive policies and strategic plans that address ALE. As these challenges were discussed during the sessions it was observed that the lack of comprehensive policies and strategic plans can be attributed to the fact that ALE is often seen as an expenditure rather than an investment which could produce important returns. These returns could eventually offset and surpass the cost of investment.

Another challenge in the area of policy and governance is that the development of policies is often not evidence based, while “Sound policies and planning need sound data – reliable and timely data on literacy levels of population groups, on patterns of literacy and illiteracy, and on the types, quality and outcomes of literacy programs” (Richmond et al. 2008:44). There seem to be several reasons for the lack of evidence-based policies, one of them being that little research is carried out in the area of ALE. Though universities are institutions that should provide evidence-based information about ALE and thereby inform the policy makers and practitioners about ALE, their role in this process is not well recognized. Some countries reported that universities have not been flexible and responsive enough in their role to support ALE. At the same time, funding institutional development and research at higher educational levels has been absent, inadequate, or poorly sustained.

Furthermore, ALE faces the challenge of lack of multi-sector collaboration in that its delivery is often divided between different ministries and organizations in the absence of sufficient coordination.

Lastly, ALE faces a challenge because there are few if any links or comparable standards between formal and non-formal education. Such standards could provide recognition of non-formal achievement in the formal system. It is recognized by several countries that National Qualification Frameworks (NQF) could provide such standards.

Nevertheless, there are some advances to report in this area. Civil society and the international community have been able to promote several innovative practices and programs which have had a positive impact on ALE. Two examples are REFLECT approach to adult literacy and social change, and the *faire-faire* strategy, which is a model for decentralizing the management of education.

The recommendations in this key area are:

1. Each country should have a comprehensive national youth and adult learning education policy, including a comprehensive language policy and support for creating a literate environment;
2. The policy should be backed by legislation and provision of capacity to implement the policy;
3. The policy should take into account strategies for poverty alleviation.

Financing

While Education for All (EFA) has increased the expenditure of education in proportion to the gross domestic product of countries (ANCEFA, 2008), ALE remains poorly financed. Most of the finances for education are invested in primary education, not in ALE. There seem to be several reasons for this:

1. ALE is often seen as an expenditure rather than an investment;
2. ALE is often not carried out by the ministry of education, but by many other ministries and other stakeholders while lacking multi-sector collaboration;
3. There are very few comprehensive policies that address ALE.

The funding of ALE is seldom based on an adequate needs assessment, research data and adequate costing and budgeting. However, an example of good practice in this area comes from Kenya, where a literacy survey was carried out (KNBS, 2007). Based on the data of that survey the government was convinced of the need for ALE and changed policy, governance, and finances for ALE.

The recommendations in this key area are:

1. A new commitment by the different stakeholders, government and non-government, towards sustainable funding;
2. A minimum funding benchmark as a percentage of the national education budget;

3. The development of strategies for the mobilization of funds and for their accountable and transparent utilization thereof.

A few comments have to be made. Firstly, the reason for lack of finances in the area of ALE is closely intertwined with policy choices. Secondly, it was noted that the Abuja Call for Action recommended a minimum benchmark of 3% of the national education budget for financing ALE. "This recommendation was based on the idea that governments should spend 6% of their education budgets on adult education and half of that should go to basic literacy" (Archer 2008:100). However, most governments seem to have not taken this benchmark into account when distributing the finances for education. This illustrates how recommendations suggested by conferences like this are subject to political will.

Inclusion

This key area focused on groups of people who are excluded for different reasons. During the discussions it became clear that some groups of people have been excluded because they have physical or psychological disabilities. However, large groups of people have been excluded because they are minority (language) groups. The main reason they are excluded is that education is not provided in a language they understand. It was noted by some participants of the conference that often education programs are delivered through languages of wider communication which are poorly or not at all understood by these groups. At the same time the content of the education program is too closely related to the mainstream culture, which has little or no relationship with their own culture. Even those entering a learning program might not complete it, due to the fact that the content of the program does not have any relevance to their lives.

A challenge in this area is that while in most African countries the role of mother tongue as an effective means of communication, administration and learning is recognized, it is nonetheless not well exploited and often neglected. The final report of the conference states that "There is limited effort to use all the writing systems available to the communities" (Archer 2008:4).

An area where some advances have been made with regard to groups with special needs is education for women. In literacy and other adult education programs the issue of gender has to some extent been mainstreamed and this has had some impact on women's leadership and participation in decision making. In the whole of Africa, the literacy rate among women has risen from 45% to 53%, but the proportion of illiterate women within the total illiterate population has increased slightly from 61% to 62% (Richmond et al. 2008).

An example of an inclusive ALE program which was presented during the conference is the ALE program for nomadic people in Nigeria. This ALE program makes use of mobile classrooms and radio broadcast to educate people. They have been able to provide education for 10% of the nomadic population, where only less than 1% had participated in education before (UIL 2007a).

The recommendation for this key area is:

1. Promote inclusion through ALE programs that take into consideration the specific needs of the minorities, vulnerable and marginalized groups, and groups with special needs.

Participation

The concept of participation referred to collaboration of stakeholders providing ALE. The country reports showed that there are many more stakeholders beside the government involved in ALE. However, there is little consultation among the different stakeholders and between the stakeholders and the government. At the same time the role of civil society groups, NGOs and FBOs was recognized as being important. They are the people who work in the field, are in touch with the target groups, and are able to provide ALE relevant to the target group.

The challenges for the government are already mentioned under policy and finance. The government often does not have an awareness of who is participating in delivering ALE programs and to what degree, nor is there inter-sectoral collaboration. There is often insufficient collaboration between government and others (including other ministries) involved in delivering ALE. This results in lack of shared information and lack of synergy.

The recommendations for this key area are:

1. Collaboration between government, private sector, and civil society organizations (NGOs, CBOs, religious and other organizations) in developing policy and program strategies for ALE;
2. Encouragement and support for the role of civil society;
3. Development of accountable and transparent frameworks for collaboration.

Monitoring tools

There are still several challenges in the area of monitoring. In order to monitor programs, clear objectives, reliable data, and a reliable management information system must be in place. Most countries lack ways to collect reliable data. ANCEFA (2008) noticed this in their Africa Regional Education Watch report. They report that: "The ability of most countries to halve their illiteracy levels by 2015 is blurred by lack of accurate data on literacy levels as many of these countries rely on old census data" (ANCEFA 2008:18). Accurate data is an area that needs attention. As was noted during the presentation of the Kenyan Literacy Survey, often literacy levels are estimated by self-reporting or by assuming a certain number of years in school to be equivalent to having attained literacy. These kinds of data-gathering techniques do not produce reliable data, as they do not show how well someone can read. The Kenya Literacy Survey shows how self-reporting is less reliable than actually testing people's literacy abilities. The Survey used both methods and the results showed that

people rated themselves higher in literacy achievements than the actual test showed (KNBS, 2007). Having reliable data enables a government and other stakeholders to develop policies and strategies that are appropriate for the country.

In addition, it was noted that there is the need for non-formal education to be linked to the formal system so that learners receive recognition of knowledge and skills obtained through non-formal education, allowing them to receive formal credit for those skills and knowledge acquired non-formally. A national quality framework (NQF) is a tool that can monitor such accreditation and assist in establishing links between the two systems. Some advances have been made in this area as several African countries are developing NQFs.

Recommendations for this key area are:

1. Governments should develop quality assessment, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms;
2. Governments should ensure research and data collection in order to formulate and regulate policies and programs and to evaluate the impact of ALE;
3. Governments should develop National Qualification Frameworks;
4. Quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation should be conducted at sub-regional and regional level;
5. A peer evaluation strategy that involves civil society should be developed.

Other issues

Beside the five key areas other areas were identified as being important in addressing issues in ALE. One area is professionalization of ALE personnel. Many countries experience difficulties in this area. Many adult education practitioner qualifications are not recognized and there is a need for better conditions of service. Also, the tertiary institutions at the national and regional levels need to be strengthened to educate and train practitioners, managers, and policy developers in adult education.

Another area that was recognized as needing attention is the implementation of programs. Questions posed during the conference included, "What is an effective ALE program?", "What curriculum is needed?" It was noted by some participants that the curriculum question is crucial to the success of an ALE program. Although the opening speech given by a representative of civil society placed literacy and ALE in the context of development, the area of ALE is still seen as separate from development, which influences the relevance of ALE programs for the learners. Not only the relevance of a curriculum is an issue in implementations of programs, also the expansion of a program is an important issue. A small successful pilot program might need to be differently organized when expanded. While some good practices were shared, they were not discussed, and did not feed into the general issues.

The area of ICT and media was also seen as an area that needs to be developed to serve ALE better.

In general, the outcomes and issues identified during the conference seem to reflect the needs of ALE on the continent. However, as has been noted several times during the conference and in this report, a conference like this cannot dictate policy to governments, it can only give recommendations. The implementation of the recommendations remains subject to political will. Having said this, there are several recommendations that are relevant to all stakeholders engaged in ALE. For example the key areas inclusion, participation, and monitoring have highlighted areas of need that can be addressed by all stakeholders.

Conclusion

The Africa regional preparatory conference has succeeded in several important areas. Firstly, the issues, needs, and recommendations of the Africa region have been clarified. Secondly, a sense of Africa regional unity and support for the outcomes has been achieved. Thirdly, the need for all stakeholders to work together has been acknowledged and significant networking to this end has been facilitated. Though not all questions or uncertainties have been eliminated, especially in the area of information provision, the efforts of the Africa regional preparatory conference have generated the momentum and unity necessary for a successful global conference this May in Brazil.

The Africa regional preparatory conference raised awareness of several areas of need: policy formulation, allocation of funds, inclusion, and coordination of ALE stakeholders/implementers. The Africa regional preparatory conference for CONFINTEA VI has provided good reason for all participants to believe that they have been well represented in the outcomes. The inclusive attitudes on the part of the UIL staff and their efforts to build consensus and ensure full participation resulted in a sense of ownership and shared responsibility on the part of all that were present.

As stated in the draft summary of the country reports and in the Final Outcome Document, it is crucial that all stakeholders cooperate and contribute their strengths if ALE goals are to be realized.

A remaining concern is that of information and research, which are crucial to both recommendations and implementation. The lack of data and insights in some country reports, as well as the omission of some relevant research, has an adverse impact on effective planning and implementation. For that reason, efforts should be increased to assure that these essential inputs are made available.

In the end, however, good policy and well earned enthusiasm are powerless without sufficient political will and the resources necessary to assure their implementation. CONFINTEA V did not have the effect hoped for. As stated by UIL, "the recognition and strong commitment expressed in 1997 (CONFINTEA V) did not lead to the

corresponding, integration, policy prioritization and allocation of resources for adult learning and education, either nationally or internationally" (UIL 2007b:1). DVV International further states that "Since the last CONFINTEA meeting in 1997, there has been little or no investment in adult education across Africa, Asia and Latin America" (DVV International 2008:99). If, indeed, there has been so little progress since the last CONFINTEA meeting apparently due to lack of will on the part of some major stakeholders, do we now have reason to believe that the next decade will be any more promising? Has there been sufficient change of heart or economic circumstance to assure that any recommendations resulting from CONFINTEA VI will likely be implemented? Such are the limitations that could restrict progress despite the promising preparations made at the Africa regional meeting.

Abbreviations

- ALE - Adult learning and education
- CBO - Community based organization
- DESD - Decade of Education for Sustainable Development
- EFA - Education for All
- FBO - Faith based organization
- GRALE- Global Report on Adult Learning and Education
- ICT - Information and communication technology
- MDG - Millennium Development Goals
- NGO - Non government organization
- NQF - National Qualifications Framework
- UNLD - United Nations Literacy Decade
- LIFE - Literacy Initiative for Empowerment

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