Reformulating Education for All (EFA) Policy in a Framework of Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning provides an overarching vision of EFA. It offers the necessary guiding and organizing framework for educational reform. It encompasses learning throughout the lifecycle in formal, non-formal and informal settings.

Experts in lifelong learning from government, academic and civil society sectors in the South Pacific, East and South-East, and South and Central Asia met in Tokyo 9 - 12 October 2007 to share experiences of progress in achieving Education for All and to consider the relevance of a lifelong learning perspective for more effectively achieving the goals of EFA set by the Dakar Framework for Action and other development programs.

The meeting found a broad consensus about the vision and meaning of lifelong learning as a new educational paradigm, in a global economy in which countries and communities confront rapid and unpredictable social, economic, political and technological change, and where cultures, community relations and the very ecology of their lives are often challenged, threatening the cohesion of the society.

The meeting recognized that lifelong learning has great potential to reformulate, reinvigorate and refocus Education for All and make it more successful to ensure rights to education and rights to learn. The meeting felt the strong need of adding momentum to existing tendency found in some countries in the Asia-Pacific region, which are already integrating education and learning into national and community development strategies, and are strengthening cooperation between agencies and sectors to make the creation of an inclusive knowledge society possible through joint efforts.

A knowledge-based society makes learning even more important, requiring a new paradigm based on using many modes of learning throughout life; as well as providing new knowledge and skills, lifelong learning empowers and helps individuals to realize their full potential and participate fully in social, political and economic life.

Although the concept of lifelong learning has been adopted first in the more economically advanced industrial societies it evolved through the work of

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1 Policy Note with Recommendations for Decision-Makers from the International Expert Meeting on Educational Policies from a Lifelong Learning Perspective in Promoting EFA (Tokyo, Japan, 9-12 October 2007)
international agencies such as UNESCO, and is equally applicable to all settings. The wealth gap and the digital divide are still widening within and between countries. Globally and nationally we still fall short of the targets we set ourselves, even for the most essential literacy and basic education.

The meeting was emphatic that equalizing, diversified, decentralized and well contextualized lifelong learning opportunities were as relevant, proper and important for people and their communities in developing countries as for the economically advanced world.

The meeting agreed

- that lifelong learning offers a powerful perspective to widen and transform education systems and make learning as a life-wide and lifelong activity a democratic, accessible and affordable right

- that governments have an essential role and responsibility to play in facilitating lifelong learning and creating the necessary conditions for its attainment, including providing for an adequate level of funding to enable all forms of lifelong learning

- that cooperation and integration of effort within and across sectors, levels and all Ministries, not only Education, is essential, as is local level initiative and coordination of effort to achieving EFA, MDGs and other development objectives

- that literacy, adult basic, continuing and non-formal education are important parts of lifelong learning, but that the concept applies to all forms of learning and schooling, from family, early years and pre-school learning throughout the formal compulsory school years and on through tertiary education, work and adult life

- that the community dimension is as important as the individual, and an essential to achieve EFA goals through lifelong learning for all

**From Vision to Policy to Practice**

A comprehensive vision of lifelong learning is needed to help empower people, expand their capacities and choices in life, and enable them and their societies to cope with rapid change in their personal, social and working lives. Within this framework *learning* is the key. Responding to learners' needs and facilitating learning must be central. For learning to become universally accessible across the lifespan, a learner-centred approach will combine with great variety and diversity of provision, enabling measures and supports, many of them based in the community.
Learning should be flexible, thereby learners are able to enter and leave the system at many different points. The learning system should include a wide range of players - families, employers and other providers including facilitators of local wisdom, NGOs, universities, the private sector and government agencies, as well as learners and teachers.

The meeting recommends that

- Policy-makers recognize and promote lifelong learning as the overarching framework for Education for All
- Governments initiate action to develop a vision for lifelong learning based on extensive consultation with all stakeholders, as the basis for developing a multi-sectoral policy framework
- Governments translate lifelong learning concepts into clearly articulated national Education for All policies, strategies and programs in ways appropriate to each country
- Governments take the lead in creating the conditions required – including support structures, institutional capacity-building, recognition of prior learning, equivalency and accreditation mechanisms - for the provision of learning opportunities for all on equal terms and in appropriate ways that include decentralized delivery mechanisms with special focus on the unreached and excluded, among them gender inequality, people with disability, ethnic and other minority groups and other vulnerable people.
- Governments give priority within a lifelong learning framework to literacy and basic education at a required level set by each country and including life skills and competency for both children and adults as a human right which in turn provides the very foundations for lifelong learning
- Governments take the lead in promoting a culture of high quality learning for all, resulting in learning outcomes that impact on people’s lives and facilitate lifelong learning becoming a universal reality.

**Diversifying Providers and the Delivery of Learning Opportunities**

Governments should guarantee access to learning opportunities at local community level as a right of all citizens. It is essential that individuals and communities be enabled as learners to realize their full potential and contribute to promoting political, economic and social stability and progress.

Knowledge, skills, attitudes and values have therefore to be acquired by a great variety of learners having different needs and learning styles, from formal education, non-formal education, open and distance education and informal
education within the framework of lifelong learning. Government commitment and effort to link learning activities with the development of present and future communities are an essential precondition.

The task of integrating the principles of lifelong learning into all stages of educational programs is too enormous and too costly for governments alone. There is no lack of providers among non-government organizations, development agencies, and other community-based organizations who can enter into cooperative partnership arrangements to deliver learning programs to a variety of learners in a variety of ways. It is important that teaching and research resources of higher education and research institutions should be fully engaged in achieving EFA. In such an environment governments need a strategy that encourages multi-sectoral alliances among private and public providers of learning programs.

It is time for governments to acknowledge and embrace the invaluable participation and engagement of partners with the capacity to provide and deliver learning opportunities at community levels. Therefore, it is important for these potential partners to work constructively with and support governments in the provision of public services. Only in the spirit of mutual trust and respect can the ambitious and essential joint lifelong learning venture flourish.

The meeting recommends that

- Governments initiate consultations with partners who are willing to provide and deliver learning opportunities at community levels, together defining rules and guidelines for their roles and relationships; on this basis a policy for diversifying the provision and delivery of learning opportunities should be adopted and disseminated as widely as possible to all stakeholders

- Partner-providers of learning programs commit themselves to conforming to quality thresholds and accreditation standards, and established equivalation at the same time being entitled to recognition, reasonable remuneration, rewards and just compensation for contracts from and engagements with governments

- Serious efforts to be initiated for senior citizens as they provide both an experienced group of resource persons and a challenge for programs for lifelong learning

- Learners be given every opportunity to choose between different programs and between different providers

Contents and methodology

In lifelong learning, what matters most is the learning itself. Lifelong learning not only adapts to changes in the society; it also makes changes, moving towards
more indigenously grounded learning. Learners are infinitely diverse. They need multi-dimensional contents to be prepared through a variety of methodologies, based on traditional, new and innovative pedagogy and andragogy, which uses diverse learning resources.

In good enabling circumstances individual learners will identify their own learning needs for themselves, grouping themselves together to make learning more fruitful and thereby catering also to the needs and requirements of the community.

There are already much experiences and strength in existing, successful learner-centred practices in many formal and non-formal educational settings. It is time for government and other providers of education to concentrate more on enhancing learning environments which will enable participatory, flexible, autonomous, contextualized learning to take root in the community, and to learn from one another and exchange good practice more systematically.

Depending upon their literacy and competency level, learners should be encouraged and assisted to make their own lifelong learning a reality.

The meeting recommends that

- Governments together with partner NGOs and other actors nurture an enabling environment, providing resources where necessary, which paves the way for communities to develop flexible and gender-sensitive curricula and content for sustainable and autonomous programs of lifelong learning

- Governments take a lead in identifying and establishing focal points of convergence at community level for providers of formal, non-formal, open and informal learning to interact under the umbrella of lifelong learning

- The inherent capacity and instinct of communities for articulating their needs and suggesting sustainable ways of addressing them be fully recognized and acted on in policy planning and implementation

- All stakeholders promote traditional forms of learning that may be supplemented by folk media and new ICT to promote local curriculum and content of functional literacy and life skills education.

**Networking**

Many kinds of partnership, networking and collaboration are necessary for lifelong learning to become a reality. Most situations at work, in communities, during sport and recreation, as well as in educational institutions, can become learning environments.
Lifelong learning requires cooperation and joint endeavor by many different government departments, and between partners in public, private and third or civil society sectors. Educational institutions, non-educational stakeholders and other community organizations at all levels need to connect and collaborate so as to enable learners to move across and between sectors as their learning needs and developing capacities require. It must be possible for learning attained in different places and ways to be recognized, assessed and accredited for formal educational progression.

For lifelong learning to become an affordable reality for all, every kind of organization in each sector must acquire the capacity to work with others, to see all members and clients as individual learners, and to enable them to learn in different ways and at different times.

Networking and partnership involves trust and reciprocity between the partners. They are required: between central and local levels; horizontally between functional areas (health, education, agriculture, social services etc); and between sectors including in particular the often under-represented non-governmental sector and community organizations.

Networking is most essential at local levels where there is most direct contact between diverse learning providers and potential learners. Much networking takes place informally and relies on mutual respect and good relations, but it also requires regular channels for working together in the interests of learners, for exchanging experiences of best practice, identifying and responding to new needs, reviewing progress and assessing performance.

The meeting recommends that

- Governments and other influential decision-takers publicly advocate the benefits and necessities of working together across all sectors for creating linkages between different systems of education.

- Central administrations in all sectors should pay more attention to empowering local communities to translate and carry out decentralized plans in locally appropriate ways

- State/province and local networks be established for greater collaboration between governments, civil society, private sectors and all providers for the overall empowerment of the individual learner.

- In each locality, different agencies and organizations that can directly or indirectly provide learning opportunities meet regularly with one another and with community representatives in community forum, committee, council or other locally appropriate ways, to enable networking among providers and with community leaders as a normal practice.
• Development stakeholders, regional and international organization should prepare effective platforms for sharing best practices.

The meeting noted the difficulty that hard-pressed administrations with tight budgets have in meeting all the old and new demands on their resources, and the temptation to deal with policy issues in tidy watertight compartments. This does not work in the case of a learning and knowledge society, and it will not enable countries to meet their fast-approaching EFA and MDGs targets.

On the other hand, adopting a lifelong learning approach to EFA and educational policy-making in general allows government to unlock a reservoir of traditional and community energy and bring the unattainable within reach. Lifelong learning is not a new program added on to existing workloads or a new budget line, but a way to reformulate existing EFA policy, become more efficient, and effective, and achieve more by tapping new energies.

The meeting recognized that a powerful new paradigm requires some years to take hold and be fully understood and used. It therefore invites governments as entities, as well as Ministry of Education, and also regional and international intergovernmental organizations and all other stakeholders, to make lifelong learning a standing item on their meeting agendas, so that its significance and utility can be rapidly absorbed and put to work.