

## UNESCO UK National Commission Literacy Working Group Response to DfID Consultation on a new Education Strategy 29 October 2009

**This response is prepared by the Literacy Working Group, an advocacy group which believes that both the Millennium Development and EFA goals would be more effectively achieved if holistic approaches were adopted. It advocates that adult literacy is a vital thread of learning which supports the development of individuals, communities and economies, as well as contributing to the achievement of all the MDGs and EFA goals. The Literacy Working Group draws its membership from Civil Society Organisations, national agencies and individuals with wide experience and expertise in the field of adult literacy and numeracy learning.**

1. The Literacy Working Group warmly welcomes the consultation. We support the idea that poverty will not be addressed unless people have the skills they need for innovation, growth and management. We strongly support the recognition of an interdependent world where education has a vital role to play in addressing inequity and promoting justice and fairness. We are delighted at the reaffirmed recognition of education as a right (1.3) and its positive contributions to health, reduction of HIV-AIDS, income and productivity as well as addressing the challenges of climate change and sustainable development along with those of social awareness, conflict and fragility.
2. The Literacy Working Group is delighted by the government's reaffirmation of its commitment to spending £8.5bn on education to 2015, despite the recent recession and the countermeasures it entailed, and by its priority to strengthen links between schools, skills and employment. This commitment suggests that DFID has recognised the importance, not only of investing in primary education but also in learning with adults and young people, as its briefing paper on adult literacy education in 2008 suggested.
3. However, we are concerned that no reference has been made to the Education for All goals, which complement the Millennium Development Goals, as a framework in which to propose an education strategy. In this context adult learning in general and adult literacy in particular, are all but ignored in the Education Strategy Consultation. The Group believes that the priorities identified would be much more effectively achieved if adult learning, especially adult literacy, was seen as an essential strand of the fabric which DFID wants to help weave. We believe that all too many children will not engage in learning, sustain school attendance nor achieve their potential, when the adults in their lives have few or no literacy or numeracy skills. Increasing physical access to education for children is unlikely to be optimally successful without the informed and educated support of parents and carers. Access must be enhanced by sustained engagement of the children and supported by parental/carer involvement.
4. Evidence from several countries demonstrates that developing skills for enterprise and employment will be less than optimally effective unless literacy and numeracy are integrated as essential components for ensuring the most productive application of work skills. [and seen as essential to successful use and application of skills for working]. Indeed, multi-country studies show clear connections between [literacy] levels of competence in literacy and numeracy in a country and both economic output and GDP per capita growth.
5. Similarly, we support the concept of improving the quality of the learning experience by addressing the training of teachers, facilitators and trainers. However, due to the limited access to learning by many teachers, adult literacy and numeracy learning should be an integral element of all aspects of their training, including on-going professional development.

**6. In short, we want to see DFID encouraging its development partners to recognise adult literacy and numeracy learning as essential and integral elements of all aspects of education, throughout primary, secondary, and skills training as well as teacher education and continuing professional development.**

**Specifically:**

**7. In relation to access and equality:**

- We agree with maintaining a gender focus as we know that of the 774million illiterate people in the world, 63+% are women. This is because girls continue to be disproportionately excluded from education and this is a fundamental cause of perpetuating injustices against women. Educating women is necessary to challenge traditional gender roles and to be empowered in the modern world. Moreover women have a great impact upon their children and therefore strongly influence their primary education. There is evidence that children with mothers who can read and write stay in school longer and achieve more.
- We believe that an increased use of initial teaching and learning in mother-tongue languages would help to contribute to effectiveness as well as increase access; bi-lingual and multi-lingual teaching approaches must be part of teacher and facilitator training as well as their continuing development.
- We also believe that more female teachers would encourage and support more girls to access and stay in learning through active role modelling. However, they must be trained, including developing their literacy and numeracy skills. The school environment must also support female teachers and students with positive attitudes as well as physically safe surroundings and appropriate sanitation. Particular attention must be paid to the distribution of women teachers. Single staff resist [don't want] rural postings –where they are most needed- because of being pestered by males, while married ones want to go where their husbands go. The result is concentrations of women teachers in the urban centres, where fewer than half the population live; and a continuing dearth of women teachers in the rural areas, where more than half the population live.

**8. Improving the quality of education:**

- We agree that early childhood is very important so emphasise the vital role which parents and carers, especially mothers must play, particularly in developing language and mental skills. Educating parents is vital and literacy related to such things as early childhood health and development is essential. It has been shown that each extra year of education for mothers is associated with a significant decline in infant mortality and improved child health.
- We urge the use of domestic, work, cultural and community customs and practices as the basis for developing relevant curricula and teaching/learning methods, so that rote and didactic learning is used less and purposes for using literacy and numeracy are used and developed more. This gives motivation and relevance to learning.
- Systematic monitoring and evaluation will be most productive and illuminating, if they incorporate participatory assessment practices. Involving adults and their children and young people in collecting qualitative data and analysing the impact of learning on their lives will immediately encourage the growth of learning communities. Equally important, it will contribute to DFID's and the world's understanding of what helps ensure the effectiveness of learning programmes for adult women and men, their families and communities.
- Improved teaching and learning must embrace literacy and numeracy development in teacher education as well as in continuing professional development.

- Good governance should embrace community organisations, groups and individuals who are supported and educated in such things as budget analysis (numeracy), running their own groups, including school management, advocacy and empowerment. Such adult learning, by definition must include the relevant literacy and numeracy learning. Taking people out of their communities to train and study in other countries only perpetuates predominantly northern models of governance and supports old hegemonies. Locally grown and developed models, relevant to different contexts and customs must be supported.
- We suggest that civil society organisations should be part of good governance by supporting [,] not only the training of adults to participate and contribute but also by monitoring and being critical friends to national and local governments as well as local schools and communities.

## 9. Employment and growth:

- Employment must explicitly embrace family and self-employment and co-operative enterprises.
- Basic education opportunities must include adults and youth.
- Basic education must be free in all phases, for the consumer.
- We believe that investment beyond school and university is vital NOW. Investing in adults will support and complement primary education; waiting until children have graduated from primary and secondary school in order to have an impact on their communities will take a long time. Investing in adults can make a difference far more quickly.
- Where skills for work and employment are delivered integrated and embedded literacy and numeracy must be provided. Research indicates that there are better outcomes in both the skill area and literacy or numeracy where integrated approaches are adopted. This links closely with purpose, relevance and increased motivation.
- We think that the contributions of the large, informal sectors of the labour market should be recognised. In response to this, non-formal and participatory community learning is likely to be more effective and relevant especially in engaging young people in learning.

## 10. Delivery:

- We welcome an emphasis on research but also on development. We think that research, without budgets to develop the results, outputs and outcomes can be wasted. We think that learners of all ages and stages should be listened to in research into what works for them. We recognise the efforts made by DFID through its research consortia but feel that more could be done to find workable answers to challenges.
- Finally:

**11.** We believe that ensuring that clearly thought-through approaches to integrating adult literacy learning into as many aspects of programme delivery as possible, will result in greater benefits for the consumers of the UK's investment as well as for the donors and the countries and communities they aim to aid.

The Literacy Working Group

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