

## Draft

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# United Nations Literacy Decade: education for all Plan of Action

## Summary

The 56th session of the United Nations General Assembly adopted on 19 December 2001 Resolution 56/116 *United Nations Literacy Decade: education for all* in which it proclaimed the United Nations Literacy Decade for the period 2003-2012 towards the goal of Education for All. In this Resolution, the General Assembly took note of the *Draft proposal and plan for a United Nations literacy decade* (A/56/114-E/2001/93) which it requested in Resolution 54/122, and it further decided that UNESCO “should take a coordinating role in stimulating and catalysing the activities at the international level within the framework of the Decade” (Paragraph 10).

This draft *Plan of Action* has been developed in response to Paragraph 11 of Resolution 56/116 in which the General Assembly requested the Director-General of UNESCO to cooperate with the Secretary-General in seeking “comments and proposals from Governments and the relevant international organizations of the draft plan for the Decade” in order “to develop and finalize a well targeted and action-oriented plan of action” to be submitted to the General Assembly at its 57th session.”

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## Introduction

1. The 56th session of the United Nations General Assembly adopted on 19 December 2001 Resolution 56/116 *United Nations Literacy Decade: education for all* in which it proclaimed the United Nations Literacy Decade for the period 2003-2012 towards the goal of Education for All. The proposal for a United Nations literacy decade was brought forward at the 54th session of the United Nations General Assembly (A/RES/54/122), endorsed at the roundtable held at the World Education Forum, Dakar, 2000, and reiterated by the United Nations General Assembly Special Session, Geneva, 2000. The proclamation of the United Nations Literacy Decade by the 56th session of the General Assembly was welcomed by the Commission on Human Rights in its Resolution 2002/23 of 22 April 2002 on “The Right to Education”.
2. Resolution 56/116 recognizes that “...literacy is crucial to the acquisition, by every child, youth and adult, of essential life skills that enable them to address the challenges they can face in life, and [literacy] represents an essential step in basic education, which is an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century, ...” (Preamble) The resolution also supports the concept of *literacy for all* in its reaffirmation that “literacy for all is at the heart of basic education for all and that creating literate environments and societies is essential for achieving the goals of eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy: ...” (Paragraph 7)
3. The United Nations Literacy Decade, as an integral component of Education for All, will provide both a platform and an impetus for achieving all the six goals of Dakar Framework for Action.

### **The six goals of Dakar Framework for Action (Paragraph 7)**

- (i) expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
- (ii) ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
- (iii) ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes;
- (iv) achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;
- (v) eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;
- (vi) improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

Literacy is the common thread that runs through these six goals, culminating in Goal vi. Indeed, the acquisition of stable and sustainable literacy skills by all will ensure that people can actively participate in a range of learning opportunities throughout life. Literacy for all is the foundation for lifelong learning for all and a tool for empowering individuals and their communities.

4. This plan of action builds on the *Draft proposal and plan for a United Nations literacy decade* (A/56/114-E/2001/93), and articulates essential requirements and the focus of actions for the successful implementation of the Literacy Decade as a thrust of Education for All efforts. It aims to stimulate action taken by national governments, local communities, individuals, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, public and private organizations and civil society in their broad coalition. It also aims to mobilize international agencies and national governments for forging global commitments.

### **Literacy for All: the Vision**

5. In the rapidly changing world of today's knowledge society, with the progressive use of newer and innovative technological means of communication, literacy requirements continue to expand regularly. In order to survive in today's globalized world, it has become necessary for all people to learn new *literacies* and develop the ability to locate, evaluate and effectively use information in multiple manners. As recalled in the *Draft proposal and plan for a United Nations literacy decade*, "Literacy policies and programmes today require going beyond the limited view of literacy that has dominated in the past. Literacy for all requires a renewed vision of literacy..." (Paragraph 8)
6. The vision for the Literacy Decade situates Literacy for All at the heart of Education for All. Literacy is central to all levels of education, especially basic education, through all delivery modes - formal, non-formal and informal. Literacy for All encompasses the educational needs of all human beings in all settings and contexts, in the North and the South, the urban and the rural, those in school and those out-of-school, adults and children, boys and girls, and men and women.
7. Literacy for All has to address the literacy needs of the individual as well as the family, literacy in the workplace and in the community, as well as in society and in the nation, in tune with the goals of economic, social and cultural development of all people in all countries. Literacy for All will be effectively achieved only when it is planned and implemented in local contexts of language and culture, ensuring gender equity and equality, fulfilling learning aspirations of local communities and groups of people. Literacy must be related to various dimensions of personal and social life, as well as to development. Thus, literacy efforts must be related to a comprehensive package of economic, social and cultural policies cutting across multiple sectors. Literacy policies must also recognize the significance of mother tongue in acquiring literacy and provide for literacy in multiple languages wherever necessary.

## **Priority groups**

8. Literacy for All focuses on a range of priority groups. In the countries of the South particularly, women's literacy must be addressed urgently. The priority population groups to be addressed are:

- Non-literate youth and adults, especially women, who have not been able to acquire adequate skills to use literacy for their personal development and for improving their quality of life;
- Out-of-school children and youth, especially girls, adolescent girls and young women;
- Children in school without access to quality learning so that they do not add to the pool of adult non-literates.

Of the above priority population, the particular needs and life contexts of economically, socially and/or culturally disadvantaged people urgently require special attention; in particular, ethnic and linguistic minorities, indigenous populations, migrants, refugees, people with disabilities, aged people and pre-school children – especially those who have little or no access to ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education).

## **Expected outcomes**

9. National governments, local authorities, international agencies and all stakeholders are to ensure that by the end of the Literacy Decade, the Literacy for All thrust of Education for All will yield the following outcomes:

- (a) Significant progress toward the 2015 Dakar goals (iii), (iv) and (v), in particular, a recognizable increase in the absolute numbers of those who are literate among:
  - (i) women – accompanied by reduction in gender disparities;
  - (ii) excluded pockets in countries that are otherwise considered to have high literacy rates;
  - (iii) regions of greatest needs, namely, sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and E-9 countries;
- (b) Attainment by all learners, including children in school, of a mastery level of learning in reading, writing, numeracy, critical thinking, positive citizenship values and other life skills;
- (c) Dynamic literate environments, especially in schools and communities of the priority groups, so that literacy will be sustained and expanded beyond the Literacy Decade;
- (d) Improved quality of life (poverty reduction, increased income, improved health, greater participation, citizenship awareness and gender sensitivity) among those who have participated in the various educational programmes under EFA.

## **Principal strategies**

10. In order to attain the above-mentioned outcomes, the implementation process of the Literacy Decade needs to place a focus on the following as principal strategies. They are essential in attaining and maintaining the above outcomes but are largely overlooked currently.
- (a) Placing literacy at the centre of national education systems at all levels and developmental efforts;
  - (b) Adopting a two-pronged approach giving equal importance to both formal and non-formal education modalities with synergy between the two;
  - (c) Promoting an environment supportive of uses of literacy and a culture of reading in schools and communities;
  - (d) Ensuring community involvement in literacy programmes and their ownership by communities;
  - (e) Building partnerships at all levels, particularly at the national level, between the government, civil society, the private sector and local communities, as well as at the sub-regional, regional and international levels;
  - (f) Developing systematic monitoring and evaluation processes at all levels, supported by research findings and databases.

## **Key areas for action**

11. For the successful implementation of the Literacy Decade for Literacy for All, the above principal strategies must be put in place in reality at all levels through actions that are coordinated and complement each other. The key areas for action are policy, programme modality, capacity-building, research, community participation and monitoring and evaluation. It must be stressed that all actions must address the gender equality perspective in all its ramifications.
- (I) **Policy:** develop a policy environment across communities, sectors, agencies and ministries that mainstreams literacy promotion by the following.
    - (a) Develop a policy framework and incentive scheme that ensure multi-ministerial collaboration as well as a financing scheme to enhance literacy programmes in formal, non-formal and informal education, spelling out expected roles of the private sector, civil society and individuals;
    - (b) Engage communities (including community-based organizations, families and individuals), civil society organizations, universities and research institutes, mass media and the private sector in providing inputs into literacy policy;

- (c) Provide a framework for context-sensitive development of literate environment, such as:
- promoting multilingual and multi-cultural education
  - encouraging local literature production
  - encouraging participation of the book publishing industry and establishing and supporting community libraries toward Reading for All
  - widening access to tools for expression and communication, such as newspapers, radio, television and ICTs, as well as promoting freedom of expression;
- (d) Ensure that literacy is part of broad discussions on poverty reduction – eg. PRSPs (Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers), multi-agency collaboration, such as the Common Country Assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework (CCA/UNDAF) as well as education – eg. EFA planning, SWAP (Sector-wide Approach);
- (e) Ensure that literacy promotion is an integral part of planning and implementation for educational components relating to health, agriculture, rural and urban development, conflict and crisis prevention, post-conflict reconstruction, HIV/AIDS prevention, environment and other inter-sectoral issues;
- (f) Put literacy on the agenda at national, subregional, regional and international forums on development and education - eg. United Nations Summits, G-8, OECD, conferences of Ministers of Education, regional partnership mechanisms such as NEPAD (New Partnerships for Development in Africa), national development consultations.
- (II) **Programme modality:** in order to achieve Literacy for All and thus Education for All goals, which cut across all age groups in and out of school, literacy programmes must cover the whole life cycle to enable lifelong learning and be gender-sensitive, and must be delivered through both non-formal and formal approaches. They must also be built on the already available literacy programmes, and at the same time, should add newer literacy programmes by forecasting the future literacy needs. It is therefore essential to recognize the need for the following actions.
- (a) Develop programmes which aim at meaningful uses of literacy in addition to the acquisition of the basic literacy skills of reading, writing and numeracy, spanning various age groups from pre-school age to adulthood. Such programmes could encompass literacy readiness for pre-school children as well as family literacy, literacy for primary school children, for school drop-outs, for out-of-school children and adolescents and for non-literate youth and adults, addressing such content needs as:
- Literacy for vocational upgrading and employment
  - Post-literacy and continuing education programmes for a variety of client groups, including ICT literacy
  - Information literacy, including media literacy, legal literacy and scientific literacy;

- (b) Design programmes that give learner motivation a high priority through meeting the needs of learners and supporting literate environment. The following actions are suggested to this end.
    - i) Develop diverse modes of delivery including the use of ICTs;
    - ii) Develop gender-sensitive content, materials and methodology, building on local languages, knowledge and culture;
    - iii) Integrate literacy instruction in other sectors such as health education, agricultural extension education and income generation schemes;
    - iv) Have reading materials available for children and adults in mother tongue and a second language in schools and communities;
  - (c) Establish linkages and synergy between formal and non-formal education through the following.
    - i) Develop equivalency programmes to bridge formal and non-formal education by establishing policies, guidelines, accreditation mechanisms, etc.;
    - ii) Upgrade literacy facilitators' credentials through professional training and providing official recognition to non-formal education facilitators on par with formal school teachers;
    - iii) Establish distance education programmes that enable people who have left formal education to progress at their own pace until they are ready to re-enter the formal education system;
    - iv) Encourage bridges between teachers' associations and non-formal education facilitators.
- (III) **Capacity-building:** in order to implement educational programmes as part of the Decade, it is necessary to ensure that various partners and stakeholders have the requisite capacities for running such programmes in a sustained manner in such areas as listed below.
- (a) Planning and management: organize capacity-building activities for educational planners and decision-makers at regional, subregional, national and local levels, built in on-going educational programmes, in such areas as: fund-raising, programme designing and implementation, multi-sectoral cooperation, project documentation and reporting;
  - (b) Research: design programmes for strengthening the capacity of NGOs, community-based organizations and civil society organizations to carry out action research;
  - (c) Training of trainers: identify and support a core group of trainers at regional, subregional, national and sub-national levels who can train programme personnel, including teachers and facilitators at the local level;
  - (d) Training systems: develop training systems that are gender-sensitive and can be adapted to different contexts and purposes and can be used at sub-national and local levels;
  - (e) Curriculum: develop literacy curriculum frameworks at regional, subregional and national levels that can be adapted to local curricula and lesson plans according to the needs of specific learner groups at the local level.

(IV) **Research:** in order to effectively use research findings for literacy policy formulation, improvement of literacy programmes, and periodic review of the progress toward Literacy for All, specific and well-designed research activities and projects will have to be undertaken during the Literacy Decade, which include the following.

- (a) For the purpose of policy formulation: conduct baseline studies for identification of priority groups, levels of literacy, local needs, resource availability, likely partnerships, mapping gender disparities, etc.;
- (b) For improving primary schools and non-formal education programmes: conduct process research to enable educational planners and administrators to make mid-course corrections on the basis of research findings;
- (c) For deeper insights into the concept of Literacy for All: conduct longitudinal studies on uses of literacy in schools and communities, as well as mapping emerging and new literacy practices in the context of ICTs;
- (d) For empowerment of local communities: conduct research in how local communities can participate in literacy programmes and derive benefits from such programmes;
- (e) For research utilization: critically review relevant research in the North and South, for adoption and adaptation of research results for use in policy and practice in new contexts.

The following actions are proposed for facilitating the development of the above research activities.

- (a) Create a database on literacy studies including evaluation studies;
- (b) Encourage universities, institutions of higher education and research institutions to put literacy on their research agendas;
- (c) Create networks of research organizations for cooperation between countries and regions, ensuring participation from the North as well as the South and encouraging cooperation between countries of the South.

(V) **Community participation:** the success of the Literacy for All programme depends on the extent of the involvement of the local community in the programme, and the willingness of the local community to take on the ownership of the programme. It is important that the government should not seek community involvement as a cost-cutting strategy, and it must be remembered that occasional campaigns and festivals do not ensure community participation in educational programmes. Some of the steps in securing community participation are the following.

- (a) Document experiences of governmental organizations, NGOs and the private sector on community participation in literacy programmes;
- (b) Provide technical and financial support for sustaining community-based programmes of literacy;
- (c) Create sub-national/national networks of NGOs working with local communities for literacy;



- (d) Encourage local communities to organize community learning centres;
  - (e) Share experiences of successful community learning centre programmes among countries;
  - (f) Develop appropriate tools for communication between governments and communities as well as among communities, including the use of ICTs.
- (VI) **Monitoring and evaluation:** for the success of the Literacy for All programme, it is necessary to build functional monitoring information systems across various programmes and different levels (institutional/sub-national/national/international). The systems should be designed to provide reliable and meaningful information on the status of literacy among the population, on uses and impact of literacy, and on the performance and effectiveness of literacy programmes. The following actions are proposed for building an effective monitoring and evaluation system.
- (a) Refine literacy indicators and methodologies to enable countries to systematically collect and disseminate more and better information, with particular attention to providing information on gender gaps;
  - (b) Promote widespread and better use of population data, for example through demographic censuses and surveys, in monitoring literacy status, use and impact among the population;
  - (c) Develop cost-effective methods for assessing literacy levels of individuals for use in literacy surveys, as well as in regular evaluation of learning outcomes at the programme level;
  - (d) Build information systems to support policies and management of non-formal education among agencies, programmes, learners and educators;
  - (e) Establish long-term tracking systems of new literates for studying the impact of literacy on the quality of life.

### **Implementation at the national level**

12. The state must play the central and crucial role in planning, coordinating, implementing, and financing programmes for Literacy for All. In order to fulfill this role, the state must build symbiotic partnerships with a variety of stakeholders. It is therefore necessary to mobilize the local communities, NGOs, teachers' associations and workers' unions, universities and research institutions, the private sector and other stakeholders to contribute to and participate in all stages of literacy programmes.
13. The successful implementation of the Literacy Decade requires that Literacy for All be the central focus of all EFA plans and programmes. Thus, it is necessary to remember that a plan for the Literacy Decade and its implementation at the national level must be incorporated in the national EFA plan and its implementation. Where the national EFA plan has already been formulated, the Literacy for All component can be added as a supplement. Where the national EFA plan is being finalized, it would be appropriate to incorporate the Literacy for All component within it. In the process of incorporating a Literacy for All component in the EFA plans, each country

will have to prepare a check-list of key questions and essential elements for the actions. A sample check-list is found in Annex I.

14. The Literacy Decade must be viewed as a unity and not as a sum of ten successive single years. Every country, therefore, must plan within its own ten-year perspective for implementing Literacy for All. In so doing, attention should be paid to ensuring that the initial period of the Decade is devoted to the creation of comprehensive and reliable databases on literacy. An example of such a ten-year timeframe is attached in Annex II.

### **Resource mobilization**

15. The Literacy for All intervention must not suffer or languish on account of insufficient funding. Governments need to mobilize adequate resources in support of Literacy for All. The following strategies may be adopted at the national level.
  - (a) Incorporate the Literacy for All component across the budget for all levels of education, from basic education to higher education;
  - (b) Attract additional funding through coordination and resource sharing with other ministries and departments where literacy is a component of programmes of advocacy, extension education and poverty reduction;
  - (c) Mobilize private sector and civil society to support the Literacy for All programme.

At the international level, successful resource mobilization will require:

- (a) Ongoing consultation among UN agencies in support of Literacy for All as a component of EFA;
- (b) Involvement of bilateral agencies for their financial support and commitments;
- (c) Mobilization of international civil society in support of Literacy for All.

A special role should be given to the World Bank with the task of integrating the Decade in PRSPs and preparing a special funding chapter with EFA. At the regional level, it is also possible to attract financial resources from regional organizations and regional banks. In order to attract international funding, it is essential to formulate credible projects based on research, justifying investment in literacy. These projects must also have carefully worked out costs and effects based on actual studies.

### **International support and coordination**

16. The United Nations System as a whole sets the promotion of literacy in the context of human rights, seen as indivisible and interdependent. The right to education, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which literacy is both a crucial element and a tool, connects with the right to equality (especially gender equality), to development, to health and to freedom of expression. UN agencies as well as the World Bank engaged in these various sectors recognize these connections and frequently include literacy as one of the problems to be addressed and solved in conjunction with the fulfilment of other rights. As the coordinating agency for the

achievement of the goals of the Dakar Framework for Action for Education for All, as well as for the Literacy Decade at the international level, UNESCO will work within the EFA coordination mechanism already established, through which it will identify literacy components in the ongoing development programmes of various international and bilateral agencies, with a view to forging joint mobilization and maximum use of resources among these agencies in support of the Decade.

17. In consultation with the relevant United Nations agencies, UNESCO will work towards creating meaningful and goal-oriented partnerships in order to encourage inclusive planning and implementation of the Literacy Decade. Such a partnership will ensure efficient delivery of different inputs provided by the UN agencies. A key partner will be UNICEF, the lead agency in United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI). The World Bank will work with UNESCO in cost and financing analysis for literacy and literacy assessment, for which OECD and UNICEF can also be key partners. UNESCO will facilitate cooperation among other UN agencies whose mandates and programmes are strongly relevant to achieving Literacy for All, such as those listed below.

FAO	rural development, agricultural extension programmes
ILO	learning and training for work, elimination of child labour
OHCHR	right to education, gender equality, right to development, right to freedom of expression, indigenous peoples (languages, cultures, knowledge)
UNAIDS	education about HIV/AIDS
UNDP	rural development, participatory citizenship, democratic governance, poverty reduction, sustainable livelihood
UNFPA	teacher training and curriculum development regarding reproductive health and population
UNHCR	education as a key issue in supporting refugee children
WFP	Food for Education
WHO	Health for All, primary healthcare education, access to health information, safe motherhood, HIV/AIDS prevention

## **Annex I      Check-list for implementation at the national level**

### **Key Questions**

- What is the current status of literacy in the country?
- What is the status of literacy programmes in schools?
- What literacy programmes are being implemented?
- What are the relationships between these programmes and other programmes for social and economic development?
- What are the problems/ bottlenecks in running these programmes?
- How will Literacy for All be incorporated in the EFA plans?
- Which priority groups need to be included in the literacy programmes during the Decade?
- What types of literacy should be included in the programmes of Literacy for All?
- What kind of data is needed for planning further inputs for these programmes?
- What proportion of the education budget should go to literacy programmes?
- Where and how can additional funding be obtained? (eg. private sector, bilateral sources, regional and international bodies)
- What roles are to be played by whom in the planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the programmes for Literacy for All?

### **Essential Elements**

- Policy and planning: plan for the Literacy Decade through incorporating a Literacy for All component in EFA plans, with a realistic timeframe for the entire 10-year period of the Literacy Decade;
- Advocacy: draw up plans for advocacy actions at all levels in cooperation with all stakeholders such as government functionaries, NGOs, civil society, institutions, funding agencies, local communities, local governments, potential learners;
- Capacity-building: develop training programmes for all categories of stakeholders in the areas of planning, research, training, curriculum development, materials development, monitoring and evaluation
- Partnership: build effective partnerships with other ministries, NGOs, civil society, institutions, universities, private sector, funding agencies, international agencies, UN agencies and the media
- Research: carry out baseline study for priority identification; support action research for developing alternative models and process research to review programme implementation;
- Monitoring and evaluation: establish and activate realistic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; develop databases and keep track of current status of literacy;
- Celebration: plan regular celebration of the Literacy Decade on International Literacy Day in order to maintain momentum and commitment. Plan regular media events as part of celebration;
- Resource support: ensure adequate human and financial resources.