I. Introduction

This report constitutes the Arab region’s main input into the CONFINTEA Mid-Term Review process. It is also an attempt at a critical assessment of the progress made since the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA), which took place in Hamburg in July 1997, and the Arab Regional Preparatory Conference, which took place in Cairo in February of that year.

The report, prepared by the UNESCO Bureau for Education in the Arab States, is based on the decisions, commitments and plans of action emanating from both the International Conference and the Regional Preparatory Conference, and compares and measures the progress made against documents resulting from those two meetings. It will also include the response from a 15-point questionnaire that has been sent to 18 countries and a number of literacy and adult education organizations, in attempt to glean information that may not be available or may not yet be documented.

Attached to this report is information gathered from two Arab NGO consultations that took place in Cairo, organized by the Arab Network for Literacy and Adult Education (ANLAE). The consultation was based on a questionnaire prepared by the ANLAE in collaboration with the Center for Adult Education at Ain Shams University in Egypt. (Annex I.)

Every attempt has been made throughout this report to use the latest information available and to verify facts and figures with the countries concerned. Much of this report will focus on the efforts being made to reduce or eradicate illiteracy, this being the most urgent issue where adult education is concerned in the Arab region.

A Regional Preparatory meeting for the Mid-term Review was held in Hammamat, Tunisia from July 15 to 18, 2003, in order to gather information and enrich the Arab Regional Report, and to discuss future regional actions within the CONFINTEA Framework for Action. Therefore, much of the information contained in this report is taken from the National Reports of 17 countries* entitled “Adult Education and Literacy: Six Years After Hamburg” that were presented at the meeting.

The meeting reiterated that much of the adult education work in the region revolves around literacy and that the understanding of adult education remains anchored in literacy and post-literacy programmes, those being regional priorities. Although many countries do include issues such as the environment, citizenship and democracy education, life skills, as well as agriculture and health education in their literacy curricula, the emphasis is still on literacy.

Additionally, it was revealed that there is a shortage in the availability of statistical and narrative information on adult education and literacy in the region, and some of the information is unreliable. This has been attributed to the lack of dependable centralized documentation and information collection. While there are many successful programmes in many countries, and valuable studies that are worth duplicating and adapting, they have not been sufficiently documented, published or distributed. Therefore, it was concluded that there is a body of knowledge in the region that is not being shared and not been being made use of.

* Countries represented at the Hammamat meeting: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, as well as the Arab Network for Adult Education and Literacy and other NGOs and civil society organizations.
Also critical, in this context, is the absence of information systems in the area of curriculum development and evaluation; and the lack of measurable indicators on which to base evaluations and the review of programmes, and by which to make informed decisions and policies for future strategic planning. This report will include a number of recommendations that arose from the Regional Preparatory meeting on these issues.

Additionally, although country reports and research material indicate that evaluation of programmes has taken place in many countries and that changes to curriculum, programme content, methodology and teacher training have resulted, there is little or no documentation or data of either the evaluation results or the changes they have effected.

Information on curriculum development and analysis of the materials and books is also sketchy or non-existent. Which is not to say that such activities do not take place in the region. Such deficiency indicates not so much a lack of action in adult education, but negligence in documenting such action.

In this context, the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States commissioned Dr. Fawzi Ayoub to conduct a study on the “Evaluation of Literacy Books in the Arab Region”. The study was published shortly before the Hammamat meeting and the findings were presented at the meeting. A synopsis is found in Annex II.

II. Background

The first International Conference on Adult Education was held in Elsinor, Denmark in 1949. Since then there have been four more conferences that have deepened the discussions on and the understanding of adult education. These have taken place in Montreal, Tokyo, Paris and Hamburg in 1960, 1972, 1985 and 1997 respectively.

The concepts around adult education have evolved through the years from the upgrading of professional skills, to literacy, to lifelong learning and empowerment through education. While the Montreal conference asserted adult education’s role in upgrading and improving professional qualifications and established it as a condition for achieving economic progress, Hamburg expanded that understanding to include all types of learning engaged in by adults, and whose aim is to improve people’s lives and abilities to participate in a more holistic way in overall social and human development.

Other conferences on education over the years have taken into consideration many of the agreements and resolutions on adult education. A case in point are the Education for All goals set in the Dakar Framework. Three of the six Education for All goals are concerned with adult education. These are:

- **Goals # 3** Ensuring...learning needs...of adults are met through...access to life skills programmes.
- **Goal # 4** Achieving 50% improvement in adult literacy by 2015...
- **Goal # 5** Enhancing educational quality...Ensuring...measurable learning outcomes are achieved...especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

(Dakar Framework for Action)
A. CONFINTEA V (Hamburg, 1997)

The Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), which was held in Hamburg in 1997, provided a comprehensive and holistic view of adult education. *Agenda for the Future*, the Hamburg document, makes the links between past conferences and declarations on adult education, including the *Learning to Be* (UNESCO 1972), the *UNESCO Recommendations on Adult Education* (1976) and Delors Commission’s report on Education for the 21st Century, entitled *Learning: The Treasure Within*. It also links and emphasizes the role of education, and adult education in particular, to a host of international conference resolutions and agreements from Meeting Basic Learning Needs (Jomtien, 1990); Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992); Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), Population and Development (Cairo, 1994); Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995); Women (Beijing, 1995); and Human Settlements (Istanbul, 1996).

The result of this comprehensive view of the role of education in all aspects of human development was a multi-layered agenda that dealt with adult education across a broad spectrum of themes:

- Adult learning and democracy: the challenges of the twenty-first century
- Improving the conditions and quality of adult learning
- Ensuring the universal right to literacy and basic education
- Adult learning, gender equality and equity, and the empowerment of women
- Adult learning and the changing world of work
- Adult learning in relation to environment, health and population
- Adult learning, culture, media and new information technologies
- Adult learning for all: the rights and aspirations of different groups
- The economics of adult learning
- Enhancing international co-operation and solidarity

Although not each one of those themes is a priority in the region, however, as will be made clear through this report, attempts have been made to deal with all with varying degrees of success.

Moreover, in its organization as well, CONFINTEA V represented a departure from traditional United Nations conferences and set a precedent in the area of democratic participation and inclusion. Basically, it can be said, practicing what it preached. For the first time in the history of United Nations conferences, government officials and NGO representatives were participating in a conference on an equal footing, sharing the space, the stage, exchanging ideas and input.

What was essentially a symbolic gesture aimed at underlining the role of NGOs in all aspects of adult education from instituting a vision to programme design to delivery of programmes, was translated over the past seven years into actual cooperation and collaboration between governments and NGOs in the Arab region. This report will attempt to highlight how this collaborative relationship has been strengthened and explore the structures that have been put in place to support it.
Box 1

One of the main results of CONFINTEA V in the region: Arab Network For Literacy and Adult Education

The establishment of the Arab Network For Literacy and Adult Education has been identified as one of the major results of CONFINTEA V (Hamburg, 1997). The ANLAE was established in 1999 in Egypt to support NGOs and civil society organizations and enable them to play an active role in literacy and adult education. Its main objectives are:

- To encourage the establishment of new associations at the grassroots level;
- To connect the Network's activities at the local, national and regional levels with similar activities at the regional and international levels.

The main priority of the Network is to activate NGOs and civil society through:

- Setting a strategy for work in literacy and adult education issues within the context of lifelong learning;
- Coordinating the planning, implementation and follow up of programmes among NGOs, Arab governmental and semi-governmental organizations;
- Focusing on the problems of school dropouts;
- Involving the media in the work of adult education.

B. Concepts of Adult and Non-formal Education in the Arab World

Adult non-formal education is defined as any organized educational activity that takes place outside the formal scholastic framework and educational system. It aims at meeting the educational needs of learners not enrolled in formal education, those who have dropped out of school or those who have never had a chance to receive formal schooling, due to a complex and intricate set of social, economic reasons as well as the failure of basic education systems to retain students. These may be adults, youth or children. In the Arab region, a large percentage tends to be women or girls who have not had the same opportunities as men or boys.

Therefore, adult education in the region has been a way to make up for what people have missed in terms of formal schooling and a way of combating the serious illiteracy problem that has burdened the region. In the past decade, however, adult education in the region has begun to take on other characteristics more prevalent in other parts of the world.

These include providing people with, in addition to literacy, the skills and knowledge needed to respond effectively to the growing challenges of new technologies and the information age. Adult non-formal education has become more diversified recently in terms of levels, goals, content, methodologies, teaching and learning skills, monitoring of progress and evaluation of results.

In the Arab region, adult non-formal education also includes equivalency classes for those who did not finish primary, basic education, and for youth who missed the opportunity for schooling or who dropped out of school. It also includes vocational training, and, in the last few years, technology and computer training. Additional topics have been added to the non-formal, adult education programmes in most countries of the region since the mid-1990s. These include, health and environmental education, basic science, life skills, and family education. In short, all education that aims at helping youth and adults develop their capacities, knowledge and skills, enhance their qualifications, positively influence their behaviour and contribute to their economic, social and cultural well-being, and allows them to become productive, participating members of society. It is viewed as a basic and integral part of all human, social and economic development programmes.
C. Concepts of Literacy in the Arab World

It is important to begin with a definition of adult education as it pertains to the Arab region. It is both fortunate and unfortunate that the focus of adult education in the region as a whole has been primarily on literacy. Apart from countries such as Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon and Qatar that have been able to raise literacy levels, and that are now expanding the scope of adult education, most of the region still deals with adult education as a literacy issue.

Adult education in the region is also a way of closing the gap left by the formal education system before the universalization and expansion of basic education that took place over the last decade. It is also a way of narrowing the gender gap in education, and achieving education for all, a point emphasized at the Regional Preparatory Conference for CONFINTEA V in Cairo (February 1997)

Literacy, therefore, is one of the main types of both formal and non-formal, adult education that takes place in the Arab region, and is considered the pre-requisite to all development programmes. Due to the prevailing situation, therefore, literacy has been the main activity on the adult education agenda.

D. The Challenges

The region has faced a number of challenges, however, in its attempts to implement the recommendation of both CONFINTEA V and the Regional Preparatory Conference for CONFINTEA V. One of the main challenges that has stood in the way of setting and achieving a comprehensive development agenda has been the continued armed conflicts, wars and threats of war that have menaced the region over the past two decades. This, perhaps more than anything else, underscores the need to make adult education in all its manifestations, a priority for the Arab world.

Another important challenge, which directly affects the writing of this report, and is linked to the ability to implement, assess, measure and evaluate the implementation, has to do with the recommendations that arose from both CONFINTEA V and the Regional Conference. Although both conferences came out with concrete sets of recommendations, none were expressed in measurable terms. Words and phrases like “encourage”, “support”, “confirm the importance of”, “help”, “strengthen”, “ensure”, to name but a few, have made any objective assessment very difficult. The absence of goal-oriented wording and specific timelines, as well as the lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms have made it difficult to judge exactly what has been achieved and how much more needs to be done.

A recommendation to come up with concrete, measurable, quantifiable goals, timelines, implementation mechanisms, and monitoring and evaluation systems was made at the Arab Region Mid-term Review Meeting in Hammamat, Tunis.

E. The Dangers

Much of the progress seen in the past two decades in the area of literacy is slowly being reversed in Palestine and Iraq due to the deteriorating security situation, drawn-out armed conflicts, economic sanctions, prolonged curfews, the inability of students to reach their schools, the destruction of schools and educational facility and physical degradation of the learning environment. Although there are no concrete statistics concerning the levels of regression, there is much concern about
the dangers facing education in general and adult education and literacy in those two countries.

Another country in which literacy levels attained in recent years may be in danger of being reversed, is Lebanon. There has been an observable increase in school drop-out rates despite the expansion and universalization of primary formal education.

During the 1999-2000 school year, there was a 98.3% enrolment rate in school. However, Ministry of Social Affairs figures indicate that 3.9% of those had dropped out by the end of the schools year and did not register for the school year 2000-2001.

The Ministry attributes the failure of these children to complete basic education for the following reasons:

- The deteriorating economic situation causing rapid inflation and rising unemployment, leading families to spend on what little they have on necessities at the expense of school fees for their children
- The lack of government-funded schools in some regions of the country, particularly those in rural and poorer areas
- The lack of awareness of the importance of education by the parents who themselves may be illiterate or semi-iterate
- The lack of confidence among a large percentage of the population in future prospects for the country and consequently for their children
- High cost of private education, making it prohibitive to all but the privileged few
- The rapid increase in youth and child employment, itself a result of the deteriorating economic conditions, forcing families to send their youngsters out to earn instead of learn.

III. Literacy After CONFINTEA V: Problems and Practices

A) Regional Literacy Rates Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Both Genders</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiteracy for over 15</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiteracy for 15-24</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Arab countries combined have managed to reduce the rates of illiteracy among the over 15 population and among the 15 to 24 year old population during the 1990s.¹

<table>
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<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
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<tr>
<td>Illiteracy for women 15-24</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiteracy for women over 15</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Improvement of literacy for women 15-24 years of age in all Arab countries except for Djibouti, Mauritania, Sudan and Yemen.² Improvement in literacy levels for women has been steady throughout the past two decades.³

¹ Eradication of Illiteracy and Adult Education: An Integral Part of EFA National Plans, Rafika Hammoud, UNESCO Beirut, 2002
² Non-formal Education for Girls, Rafika Hammoud, UNESCO Beirut, 2001
<table>
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<th></th>
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<td>71.1</td>
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<td>75.1</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.64</td>
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<td>82.3</td>
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<td>67.4</td>
<td>0.23</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

UNESCO figures [www.unesco.org/luis/ev](http://www.unesco.org/luis/ev) Statistical tables

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3 Eradication of Illiteracy and Adult Education: An Integral Part of EFA National Plans, Rafika Hammoud, UNESCO Beirut, 2002
To say that literacy is the pressing issue on the adult education agenda for the Arab region would be an understatement. If we consider that the Arab region has entered the twenty-first century burdened with over 70 million illiterates out of a population of 280 million, and that there are approximately 10 million out-of-school children who will, in no time at all, swell the ranks of the illiterate in the region, then we know we are talking about a catastrophe in the making. Literacy rates vary widely in the region from country to country ranging from 5.5 per cent in Jordan to over 55 per cent in Mauritania.

At the governmental, organizational and social levels, there is great awareness of the seriousness of the situation. Efforts to deal with it predate CONFINTEA V and most of the previous conferences on education and adult learning. But although much has been done to reduce illiteracy, results have been mixed.

In reducing illiteracy the region has made great strides and much progress over the past 20 years. National councils and commissions, and regional committees have been set up to draw up strategies and action plans, to oversee, supervise and coordinate implementation, and to monitor activities and evaluate results. Combating illiteracy is considered a national responsibility in every country, which requires the coordinated efforts of all sectors: governmental and non-governmental, public and private.

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*All statistical data used is from the EFA 2000 Assessment, unless otherwise indicated.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ILLITERACY RATE (%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>15 &amp; OVER</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>POPULATION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ALGERIA</td>
<td>2000</td>
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</tr>
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<td>BAHRAIN</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>12.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>DJIBOUTI</td>
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<td>2000</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOROCCO</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMAN</td>
<td>2000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PALESTINE</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>QATAR</td>
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</tr>
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<td>UNITED ARAB EMIRATES</td>
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<td>YEMEN</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to a study conducted by UNESCO Beirut\(^4\), published in 2001, these efforts have contributed greatly to reducing the levels of illiteracy since 1990 in the region as a whole from 48.7% in 1990 to 38.5% in 2000.

As for illiteracy reduction among women 15 to 24 in 17 Arab countries the numbers are as follows: from 44.9% in 1980 to 29.9% in 1990 to 19.4% in 2000\(^5\). Also the special attention given to reducing women’s illiteracy levels has paid off in girls and women above the age of 15 in 18 Arab countries as follows: from 64.9% in 1980 to 51.9% in 1990 to 40.2% in 2000\(^6\).

There have also been some very impressive results recorded among women 15 to 24 in 9 Arab countries where illiteracy has been reduced to less that 10%. Notable among these have been Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon and Qatar. With the exception of Djibouti and Mauritania, there have been significant advancements made in combating illiteracy in all other Arab countries.

In many areas and in certain pockets there have been success stories of varying degrees. In Lebanon and Kuwait, for example, two countries that are, in relative terms, at either end of the economic spectrum, the enrolment rate in early childhood education programmes stands at 74.5 and 98\(^7\) percent respectively. This is already showing positive results in the rates of academic attainment on the part of students and retention of students in schools and consequently on literacy rates.

B) Internal and External Problems Hindering Literacy Development in the Region

<table>
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<td>Absence of political will</td>
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\(^4\) Non-formal Education for Girls, Rafika Hammoud, UNESCO Beirut, 2001
\(^5\) Non-formal Education for Girls, Rafika Hammoud, UNESCO Beirut, 2001
\(^6\) Non-formal Education for Girls, Rafika Hammoud, UNESCO Beirut, 2001
\(^7\) Arab Regional Conference on Educations for All, EFA 2000 Assessment
C) Literacy in the Arab States: Country by Country

Although adult education has always been important in the region, particularly where literacy is concerned, a new realization regarding adult education emerged after Hamburg. The best way to ensure support, sufficient financial and human resources, is to set government policies dealing with the development of new curricula, the delivery of programmes, and cooperation between ministries, government departments and civil society and non-governmental organizations. Following are some examples of the countries that have set policies of this nature and have been implementing them.

Algeria

In Algeria, collaboration between civil society organizations and the government has resulted in using the financial and human resources available to government combined with the expertise and know-how of the organizations to:

- Draw up a long term strategy for adult literacy which concentrates on quality education, relevant educational materials, professional teacher training and the improvement of learning conditions and the learning environment.
- Activities include lectures of education and the teaching of adults open to the public, public awareness campaigns
- Fundraising activities aimed at providing quality materials to literacy centers.

Literacy rates for women and men in Algeria stood 51 and 75 percent respectively in 1999-2000, multi-lateral efforts that have included government ministries and agencies, non-governmental and community organizations and international funding partners have been implementing successful literacy programmes.

Box 1

**Successes worth noting in Algeria**

One such successful programme is being run by the Centre National d’Alphabetisation, which has integrated health education, environmental education, agricultural know how, economics, social values and life skills into adult literacy, using audio-visual materials, and sometimes computers. The programmes have been primarily directed at women and have included vocational training aimed at both income generation and the preservation of traditional crafts and products. These include pottery, knitting, leatherwork, weaving, silkworm breeding and silk work and horticulture.

Another successful literacy programme in Algeria is run by Iqraa’ and Association National de Planification Familial, with support from the ministries of education and social affairs. It is described by the Association National as follows: “the aim of this project is to achieve an appreciable increase in the literacy rate of families in rural areas, and of women and girls in particular”.

Although it has been described as successful in meeting its targets through the use of radio and television as well as especially designed textbooks and workbooks, there is no data to explain the words “appreciable increase” in measurable terms.

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8 The National Bureau for Eradication of Illiteracy and Adult Education, A Brief Description of Programmes (Arabic Leaflet)
9 The National Bureau for Eradication of Illiteracy and Adult Education, A Brief Description of Programmes (Arabic Leaflet)
Example of Good Practice/NGO Self-portrait: Iqraa’

Iqraa’, an internationally recognized accredited and award winning organization in Algeria, provided the following brief on literacy and adult education activities in that country.

Algeria has had adult education as priority for the government since its independence in 1962. It was enshrined as a right in the Constitution when 85% of the population was illiterate, and was reinforced by presidential decree in 1976 through a nine-year plan, with the establishment of the National Center for Literacy and Adult Education.

CONFINTEA V in Hamburg in 1997 resulted in new presidential decision to transform the National Center into the National Council for Literacy and Adult Education under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Education, with the following objectives:

- To encourage civil society participation in all illiteracy eradication activities.
- To draw up a new national strategy for literacy and adult education.
- To implement the government’s strategy
- To mobilize all efforts at the national level to in the battle against illiteracy.

Its responsibilities included the using of all possible means and resources to combat illiteracy; conducting studies and research on illiteracy and illiteracy eradication; raising awareness at all levels about the importance of literacy; guaranteeing the right of illiterate people to non-formal education; providing the necessary materials for national literacy activities; training literacy teachers; raising funds from all possible sources for the national activities.

Adult education priorities for Algeria at the national level and in all areas of the country are literacy, basic education, lifelong learning, women's education and are centered around the following population groups: people living in rural and remote areas; people with disabilities; prisoners, the poor and particularly women, and cover issues such as environmental and health education, life skills, human rights and citizenship education.

The leading adult education and literacy organization in the country Iqraa’ established centers across the country to absorb the school dropouts and youth under 16 years of age. The programmes offered are meant to help them catch up with the formal education programme in order to re-integrate them into the system. Teachers for these programmes are generally unemployed university graduates with degrees in such disciplines as psychology, sociology, and other humanity disciplines, who then trained by Iqraa’.

In order to motivate women to join the literacy and adult education classes, courses such as embroidery, weaving, painting on silk, sewing and hairdressing are offered along with literacy and life skills. These motivators have been particularly effective in drawing women from rural and remote areas. Additionally, they are given certificates at the end of each course, which provide a sense of accomplishment. Still there are man obstacles to these programmes include bureaucratic and administrative difficulties involved in opening new centers; the lack of sufficient financial resources; a shortage of books and educational materials; and the lack of adequate human resources since most of these efforts depend on volunteers.

After the Hamburg Conference in 1997, the association Iqraa’ drew up a new strategy for the advancement and inclusion of women, particularly those living in remote areas which entailed setting up literacy and adult education centers exclusively for women.

The first center was launched in 2000 and has been welcoming more 500 women a year. The second was opened on International Literacy Day (8 September).
in 2002 in a province that had been devastated by communal violence for more than a decade. Another center is currently being set in another province that has been undergoing the same devastation. Iqra’a is now preparing to produce appropriate literacy and adult education materials to be used by the women attending those centers. The materials will focus on such issues as poverty alleviation, community participation, sustainable development, resolution of violent conflict, and prevention of infectious and communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

Iqra’a conducts periodic evaluation of its programmes through the annual testing of learners, evaluation of the books and teaching methods used in collaboration with the National Center for Planning and Analysis, and through learner evaluation of the literacy programmes they have undergone.

Bahrain

In Bahrain the Ministry of Education put together a plan for illiteracy eradication targeting the over 10 years of age. The purpose, in addition to eradicating illiteracy, is to provide them with the skills necessary for personal and professional development, including human and citizenship rights education.

A system of incentives and rewards has been put in place whereby no government jobs can be obtained without a certificate proving the completion of this course, or a signed agreement to enroll in it.

The Gulf Countries

The Gulf countries have a combined literacy level of 84.3 per cent, with male literacy at 89 per cent and female literacy at 79.4. Qatar and Bahrain boast the highest literacy rates in the region with 89 and 84 per cent respectively, with male and female literacy almost on par. These figures, however, represent only the literacy rates for Qatari and Bahraini nationals. There are no figures for the over 50% of the population who are foreign workers.

Additionally, part of the plan’s orientation is the development of an integrated educational system for adults that combines formal and non-formal educational curricula. This measure is aimed at enhancing the quality and relevance of adult education programmes and more closely linking them to social and economic development needs.

The Government of Bahrain, through the Ministry of Education, is also directing its efforts towards women by facilitating their enrolment in flexible programmes offered in the afternoons and evenings for those who cannot attend daytime classes. This measure was instrumental in curbing the numbers of women dropping out of literacy courses. Additional conveniences for women include supervised childcare facilities within literacy centers. The number of centers offering this facility reached 19 by 2000. Health, nutrition, family life skills, child care awareness programmes are also part of literacy curricula for women, and are designed with the help and collaboration of women’s associations. Instructors in these programmes are usually university graduates who have undergone literacy training.

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10 Education and Training in Bahrain, Study, Gulf Global Economic Consultancy, December, 2000
11 Eradication of Illiteracy and Adult Education: An Integral Part of National EFA Plans, Rafika Hammoud, UNESCO Beirut, 2002
A paper presented at the Regional Workshop on Adult Education, Cairo
Egypt

In Egypt where illiteracy rates, particularly among women and rural inhabitants call for immediate action, laws have been enacted since the early 1990s to mobilize state and civil society efforts by launching the National Campaign for Literacy and Adult Education.

The National Plan for Literacy targets illiterate youth and young adults aged 15 to 35. As of 1999 the number of illiterates in this age group was 57.2%, of those 3.8 million were enrolled in literacy programmes. However, all those above the age of 35 are given a choice to join literacy programmes in order to be able to absorb the more deprived members of society into the programmes, such as women, the poor, inhabitants of rural and remote areas\(^{12}\).

According to the government statistics, illiteracy rates were reduced by 10.8 per cent in 10 years (1986-1996) bringing the percentage to 38.6. There has been a further reduction to 34.2 percent by 1999-2000.

One of the reasons for such success has been attributed to the fact that the policies adopted on illiteracy eradication were part of a comprehensive package of policies and procedures aimed at far-reaching economic and social reform. Another important factor in the reduction of illiteracy rates among children and youth has been the expansion of access to education.

The General Authority for Literacy and Adult Education developed two consecutive plans for illiteracy eradication, 1997-1998 and 2000-2001, targeting specific age groups in specific governorates with the greatest number of illiterate populations.

The national literacy curriculum developed by the Authority includes, life skills, human rights, national unity and forgiveness, rejecting extremism and violence, and respecting the other. This new curriculum, developed as part of the 2001-2002 national literacy plan, includes the use of new technologies, and employs, as part of its methodology, discussion groups on the above mentioned topics and free, guided conversation.

The Egyptian post-literacy efforts have been included adding classes for the newly literate that cover the formal basic education curriculum in a more simplified manner. 10,000 individuals graduated from these classes between 1993 and 1997, and the number has increased to 190,000 between 1997 and 2002.

During this period also, after 1997, a number of centers were opened in both rural and urban areas for the post-literacy population for vocational, skills and micro-enterprise training. In that time also, the General Authority for Literacy and Adult Education published 46 books on a variety of subjects (16 of which were produced in collaboration with UNESCO), and opened 100 lending libraries in a number of regions.

Adult education programmes in Egypt have been aimed at delivering basic education derived from the formal educational system in addition to vocational and skills training, as well as help in setting up micro income generating enterprises.

\(^{12}\) Literacy and Non-formal Education in the E-9 Countries, UNESCO, 2001
Since 1999 special post-literacy materials have been produced as well as a special daily newspaper entitled “Enlightenment” (Tanweer)\textsuperscript{13} which is distributed free of charge to the newly literate.

The 1992 law stipulating the establishment of the General Association for Literacy and Adult Education, granting it responsibility for planning, executing, implementing and coordinating educational activities in the country, represents the highest political involvement in tackling the problems of illiteracy in Egypt.

The General Association for Literacy and Adult Education has developed an innovative approach described as “free and voluntary contractual agreement for literacy”\textsuperscript{14}. The Association recruits teachers, educators, university students and vocational college graduates, and religious leaders to contribute to literacy eradication within their own communities. The Association identifies the needs and classifies the populations by age, profession and learning needs, offers books, stationery and teaching aids free of charge, and conducts testing every six months. It grants certificates of completion to successful learners and symbolic remuneration to the volunteers at the end of each six-month session.

This method has proven successful and worth repeating in more communities. However, Egypt’s large illiterate population and its huge and growing population, require a diversity of approaches, methods and techniques. Some of these include the creation of large literacy awareness cadres to visit remote densely populated areas to persuade people of the importance of literacy and invite them to join literacy classes, as well as offer health and nutrition awareness.

Another approach has been to invite well-to-do, highly respected business people to contribute to literacy eradication in their villages. Taking advantage of their social standing within the community, these people are being asked to contribute towards the building of community centers that would offer literacy classes, vocational training, cultural activities, health education, and sports facilities\textsuperscript{15}.

Radio and television are also being used in illiteracy eradication efforts. These televised and broadcast literacy lessons are offered at different times during the day and cover the majority of Egypt’s governorates. An agreement with NileSat, the Egyptian satellite channel, has been has been made at starting illiteracy eradication programmes via satellite.

In an effort to encourage lifelong and self-directed learning, the Association is distributing, free of charge, taped literacy courses and guidebooks.

Literacy classes have also been started in prisons, in community clinics, in women’s organizations, in mosques and churches, in youth and sports centers with flexible times and encouraging incentives. Hundreds of young people have been trained to offer literacy, and health professionals, such as nurses and midwives in villages have also been recruited to contribute to these efforts\textsuperscript{16}.

One new and, so far successful, experiment has been the recruiting of young female university graduates in small villages to provide literacy for women in their own

\textsuperscript{13} Non-formal Education for Girls, Rafika Hammoud, UNESCO Beirut, 2001
\textsuperscript{14} Non-formal Education for Girls, Rafika Hammoud, UNESCO Beirut, 2001
\textsuperscript{15} Non-formal Education for Girls, Rafika Hammoud, UNESCO Beirut, 2001
\textsuperscript{16} Non-formal Education for Girls, Rafika Hammoud, UNESCO Beirut, 2001
homes. The General Association provides the materials and pays for the conversion of a room into an appropriate classroom. This has been successful in providing women and young girls who are not allowed to go to literacy classes the facility of gaining those skills in neighbouring homes. It has been found that this method has not only encouraged more women to attend literacy classes, but also to continue beyond basic literacy and go on to seek more advanced education\textsuperscript{17}.

Box 3

**Example of Good Practice/Institute Self-Portrait: Ain Shams University, Adult Education Center**

The Egyptian National Plan for Adult Education and Literacy in Egypt sets as its priority the eradication of illiteracy among 100% of adults between the ages of 14 and 35 and the eradication of illiteracy among 20% of the adults between the ages of 35 and 60, according to the Adult Education Center at Ain Shams University in Cairo. In terms of priority population groups, the Egyptians have accorded top priority to the most vulnerable in society with special focus on all aspects of women's advancement including women's literacy.

Most literacy and adult education teachers and trainers are unemployed university graduates who undergo training in literacy funded by the Social Fund, which also funds literacy classes. An extensive media campaign and the involvement and cooperation of rural community and religious leaders, female health professionals, political figures and distinguished personalities have served to enhance the awareness of importance of literacy and increase participation in literacy classes.

In most cases literacy is linked to professional or skills training and followed up by extensive post literacy in keeping with the philosophy of lifelong learning. Some post-literacy courses consist of English language instruction and computer training for the high achievers in literacy classes.

As mentioned previously in the section on Egypt, self-directed learning is encouraged through radio, television, taped lessons, guidebooks and workbooks. Additionally, according to Ain Shams University, there has been active participation by the armed forces and the police force in the “battle” against illiteracy, whereby members of these two institutions have been recruited and trained to deliver literacy courses to men in some remote areas. The Ain Shams source also mentions the one-room rural schools as examples of methods that have shown remarkable results. However, there are no statistical information and analysis of results available. The Ain Shams source also asserts that there are a number of literacy programmes being implemented in women's prisons, however, no information has been found to support this claim.

One of the main influences that CONFINTEA V (Hamburg 1997) has had on the adult education scene in Egypt has been the increased awareness of the role of non-governmental and civil society organization in raising awareness and helping implement literacy programmes, according to the Adult Education Center in Ain Shams University. As a result the General Authority for Literacy and Adult Education has been increasing its cooperation with these organizations in a number of areas, namely teacher training, opening new centers in rural areas, and follow up and post-literacy programmes.

Moreover, there are two programmes designed and funded by the General Authority and implemented by civil society organizations. The first entitled “I learn, I am enlightened” is being carried out by 70% of the civil society organizations, and the second entitled “learn to become liberated” being

\textsuperscript{17} Girls Education in Egypt, UNICEF [http://www.unicef.org/girlseduction/action](http://www.unicef.org/girlseduction/action)
carried out by 50% of the organizations. Two other programme, entitled “the new teacher” \( \text{ﺍﻟﻤﻌﻠﻡ} \) and “education is light” \( \text{ﻨﻭﺭ} \text{ﺍﻟﻌﻠﻡ} \).

Some of the improvement that have been made to adult education programmes have been attributed to CONFINTEA V and the raised awareness it has engendered. In addition to furthering and deepening the cooperation between government and civil society, and resulting in the establishment of the Arab Network for Literacy and Adult Education, there has been a move toward developing more scientific approach to literacy in terms of research and an attempt to tailor programmes to the economic, social and demographic needs. There has also been a marked improvement in teacher training for adult literacy and in the development of new specialized curricula and the production special books.

In terms of priority areas in adult education, Ain Shams emphasizes environmental and health education through their literacy programmes and citizenship education. Although they acknowledge that human rights and life skills education are listed among their priorities, they admit that not much has been done on the practical level in these two areas.

A number of motivators are used to encourage people to join literacy programmes, these include symbolic financial remuneration and offering the products of handcraft classes, as well as the granting of a certificate at the end of the course. The barriers that prevent people from joining literacy classes are of a social, economic, cultural nature, as well as impediments resulting from the programmes themselves and those that have to do specifically with women.

- **Economic barriers:** most illiterate adults work in jobs that do not require them to read or write and therefore see no need to learn; the connection between poverty and literacy is not a clear one for them.
- **Social barriers:** self-consciousness about being an adult learners, the conviction that education is useless which is reinforced by an environment where the written word is not necessary to daily life.
- **Programme issues:** literacy programmes often fail to meet the immediate needs of learners; the lack of qualified, trained educators and trainers; the shortcomings of the basic education system which produces illiterates and put them off learning; the lack of incentives for learning.
- **Women’s barriers:** the wide economic and social gap between women and men; the limits imposed on women’s role in society exemplified in bearing and rearing children; women’s ignorance of their rights.

As far as evaluation goes it has so far been restricted to testing learners.

**Jordan**

In Jordan the government’s strategy is to tackle even the smallest pockets of illiteracy in Kingdom. Their target is to reduce illiteracy from the 10.5% rate of 2000 for the over 15 population to 5% by 2010. Therefore, the official policy is that there is no group too small to merit educational services. In order to ensure meeting their target the Jordanian Ministry of Education will establish literacy and adult education centers in any community that has 10 or more adult learners.

Illiteracy in Jordan today stands at less than 11% with the largest concentration among women in the over 55 population, the illiteracy rate is on the decline. These successes are attributed to a committed political will at the highest levels, and across a wide social spectrum, to the eradication of illiteracy using all the means available.

Investment in education and the strong political will to back it, have paid off well in Jordan. Between 1960 and 2000, pro-education government policies raised the
literacy rate from 33 to 95 per cent for men and 85.4 per cent women. Although there remains a gender gap, policies and programmes have been put in place to close the gap by the year 2010. Additionally, Jordan remains committed to the complete eradication of illiteracy and is working through national literacy programmes focusing in particular on women and rural areas.

Evening classes, home study programmes and summer courses have been organized to provide post-literacy or continuing education for the newly literate. In 2000 these programmes were being run through a collaborative relationship between the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and a number of NGOs and civil society organizations. These programmes are characterized by their flexibility and their ability to respond to the life and professional needs of learners.

Kuwait

Kuwait also has one of the highest literacy rates in the Arab world at 74%. This is primarily due to the fact that all education, including formal and non-formal education, is free. However, access to these programmes does not extend to the large contingent of foreign workers in that country.

Lebanon

In Lebanon, the Ministry of Social Affairs which has responsibility for adult education, along with the Council for Reconstruction and Development, developed a comprehensive three year plan (2000-2003) for illiteracy eradication, which will come under review and evaluation early in 2004.

The plan includes:
- Developing and strengthening the capacity of civil society and non-governmental organizations already working in adult education and literacy, in order to increase their effectiveness and allow them a greater role in illiteracy eradication.
- Articulating and developing a national educational programme for adults
- Developing new educational materials for illiterate people, which would help them in conducting their daily lives.
- Developing a proposal for the production of new books that would include exercises dealing with daily, practical, useable life skills.
- A plan for better and more effective coordination between the Ministry and other concerned organization and ministries.

Example of Good Practice/NGO Self-Portrait: ALPHA (Association for Human Development and Literacy)

The aim of the Association is to tie education to human development issues. It works through a comprehensive national plan drawn by the National Committee for Illiteracy Eradication, and through cooperation and collaboration with a number of NGO working in adult education to cover targeted population across the Lebanese territories.

ALPHA asserts that the Hamburg conference provided the impetus, strengthened the momentum of literacy work, and widened the scope of understanding of adult education issues. This was manifested through the change that some literacy organization underwent in blending literacy into their overall human development strategies, and the Lebanese government’s setting up of the National Committee for Illiteracy Eradication. However, according to ALPHA, the national plan for illiteracy eradication has so far remained ink on paper; it has neither been activated nor is it a government priority.

The Committee was given the overall responsibility of activating literacy and adult education programmes run by the Ministry of Social Affairs. It is also responsible for the training of literacy practitioners, monitoring and following up on literacy activities. It is currently in the process of producing new literacy materials and books for all three levels. Although part of its responsibilities is to coordinate work with NGOs and civil society organizations working in literacy and to help them in programme implementation, so far the only cooperation has been in the area of training.

ALPHA priorities change according to the educational needs in each of the areas or communities they work in. Programmes may be restricted to literacy in some areas, while they may concentrate on computer literacy and information technology in another, or to applying the basic education programme in yet another depending on need. However, the education of women is a priority that cuts across all their work. All programmes include life skills, environmental and health education, as well as human rights education to a certain extent and children’s rights education to a much greater extent.

ALPHA has produced a book, entitled “learn life” (ﺍﻟﺤﻴﺎﺓ ﺗﻌﻠﻢ) targeting illiterate and out of school youth in cooperation with UNICEF and the National Committee. ALPHA, along with the National Committee, is currently training teachers across Lebanon on three basic literacy programmes.

According to ALPHA the only means at their disposal to motivate people to join literacy classes are intellectual motivators, i.e. raising people’s awareness of the importance and benefits of learning.

Some of the drawbacks and failures, according to ALPHA, can be attributed to the lack of proper follow up and the lack of accountability when programmes go undelivered, as well as the weakness of political will in supporting literacy and adult education programmes and lack of financial resources. However, there has been effective collaboration among a number of NGOs working in education based on tying adult education programmes to the goals of Education for All and other priority human development goals. This has resulted in new programmes targeting a range of age groups, and the production of appropriate teaching and learning materials.

Monitoring and evaluation of programmes is basically done through periodic and regular assessment visits to all programmes and regular training of teachers on the principles and concepts of adult learning. Another tool of evaluation is through questionnaires distributed to teachers, field workers, and the educational experts supervising the programmes.
Box 5

Example of Good Practice/Project Self-Portrait: UNILIT: Capitalizing on the Contributions of Higher Education

UNILIT

UNILIT stands for UNIversity Students for LIteracy. The idea for the project originated at the Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education in March 1998, when UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States (based in Beirut), announced the launching of the project in the Arab states, as a joint project between the Literacy programme and the Higher Education Programme. The concept of “each one teach one” requires that each university student lift at least one person per year out of illiteracy. The hope is that by the time that student has graduated, he or she would have contributed to eradicating the illiteracy of at least four individuals.

UNILIT allows universities to extend their commitment to educating the countries human capital in the service development, and to providing educational services at different (non-traditional) levels of learning.

UNILIT aims at bridging the gap between privileged young adults and those who have not had a chance to attain an education. The UNILIT project is still in its infancy and there is as yet not enough data available to judge its success or failure. However, there have been some indications that it is potentially a powerful tool in the fight against illiteracy if it is used effectively.

How UNILIT Works

The UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education set the vision, mission, objectives and basic mechanisms for UNILIT, and established contacts with one university in each of Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Yemen, Morocco and Sudan to establish UNILIT as a pilot project in these institutions. Each university would have its own approach and its own conditions. For example, Balamand University in Lebanon designed a UNILIT programme that includes literacy through the teaching of basic health and hygiene because it is being piloted through the Department of Public Health.

The mission of UNILIT is to assist in the national efforts against illiteracy being undertaken by the countries mentioned above. It also aims at sensitizing the academic community and raising its awareness of the problem of illiteracy. The steering committee, made up of UNESCO experts and staff, and academicians from the universities, has the responsibility of overseeing the project and producing literacy materials combined with awareness raising and life skills issues. They also facilitate the coordination between the various partners and evaluate the project on an ongoing basis.

UNILIT uses university students as tutors for illiterate individuals aged 10 and above. The students recruited are trained in basic literacy, health, environment and other development related issues. They would also need to have a demonstrated ability to identify underlying social problems in their communities. Teaching an illiterate person would contribute to the development of the students’ personal awareness, commitment, and capacity to cope at the professional levels, with some of the major social issues facing humankind such as illiteracy, poverty, population, public health and social participation. The training sessions include field visits to the local communities they will be working in. The objective is that by the end of the tutoring the target groups would have gained basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills and basic knowledge of health, environment and other issues relevant to them.

UNESCO has offered each of the universities the modest sum as seed funding to be used in forging the needed partnerships between the university departments, ministries of education and non-governmental organizations. Students are offered one free academic credit for every 40 hours of tutoring they provide. Students recruited, however, need to be motivated by more than just the chance to earn free credits. They have to be interested in social and community work, concerned with helping people, enthusiastic about gaining new experiences beyond the scope of their university and every day life.

Early evaluation of the project has revealed its potential for being a successful tool in eradicating illiteracy, fostering cooperation between various social actors, civil, community and non-governmental organization, higher education institutions and grassroots communities.
Box 6

**UNILIT Personal Testimonies**

“First I didn’t feel involved because I had no experience in social work. But then I started to feel so happy. I was giving something of my heart. I was reaching out to people.” Rabih Jamaleddine, a hotel management student at Balamand University in Lebanon was amazed by the word he discovered when he joined the UNILIT programme.

Samer Annous, UNILIT Field co-ordinator at Balamand University, adds that the programme promotes social cohesion. “Rich and poor people mix and even people of different religious and cultural backgrounds come together in the programme,” he says.

Dr. Ramzi Salameh, co-responsible, along with Dr. Nour Dajani, for the UNILIT Project at UNESCO Beirut says, “It is not the students who are difficult to mobilize but the university managers. Our main problem is that the initiative has not become an institutionalized part of the universities. When a dean leaves the faculty the programme tends to disappear as well.”

**Libya**

Home schooling and family education in Libya were used as effective means to provide basic education to out-of-school children and literacy to their parents. One of the main challenges in Libya is the scattered population in vast desert areas. It was therefore found that the use of radio and television were the most effective means of reaching these populations. The programme was a concerted cooperative effort by the ministries of education, culture, information, social affairs, health, and agriculture, as well as the collaboration of civil and international organizations. By 2000 there were 28,435 individuals registered in the home schooling programme and being monitored by education experts. The programme was deemed successful and is being continued with the same degree collaboration and attention.

Another important initiative undertaken by the Libyan government has been referred to as the “free collaborative education and training programme”, which incorporates the goals of Education for All and non-formal, self-directed adult education with a focus on life-long learning. The aim of the programme is to support and shore up basic education and illiteracy eradication targets in the country. It entails forming educational collectives in which learners chose the skills and knowledge they deem necessary to help them live productive lives. This programme was started in the early 1990s, however, there is very little information as to the degree of its success and the results it has garnered to this date.

**Mauritania**

According to the national report presented by the Mauritanian Ministry of Education representative at the Hammamat meeting, much progress has been made in reducing illiteracy among women and men in urban areas. The latest statistics issued by the government of Mauritania in 2002, clearly illustrate the wide discrepancy between urban and rural literacy for both genders. Literacy for men in urban areas

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20 The Education of Girls, Rafika Hammoud, UNESCO, 2000
stands at 82.8% while rural men’s literacy stands at 52.4%. The same is true of women, who enjoy a literacy rate of 71.7% and 41.2% in urban and rural areas respectively. In this context, Mauritania is working on raising awareness of the importance of education and literacy among rural communities. One of the main difficulties it is facing, according to the national report, is the lack of support, both in terms of financial resources and expertise from regional and international organizations with the exception of the World Bank.

**Morocco**

In Morocco, where roughly 50% of the population is illiterate, the government has been collaborating with both the private sector and NGOs with the target of reducing the illiteracy rate of the 16 and above population by half by the year 2010. The government of Morocco has also signed a Learning and Innovation Loan agreement with the World Bank aimed at supporting the NGO literacy initiatives which have had, according to the world Bank, the highest levels of enrollment and which target the most marginalized groups in society such as the poor and women in rural area.

**Box 7**

**Gender Trends of Illiteracy in Morocco**

In Morocco, a direct literacy assessment module was designed and integrated into the National Survey on Household Living Standards, sponsored by the World Bank. The main objectives of this survey were to examine in greater detail the range and variability of literacy skills and knowledge among individuals, and especially among women. The literacy survey consisted of nine sections, including self-report questions on literacy skills and behaviors, questions on basic healthcare behaviors, assessment of information location skills, mental and written numeracy assessments, and assessments of reading and writing in Arabic. A national stratified sample of 2240 participants received the survey. The most significant finding was that Morocco has cut its illiteracy rate by one-half during the past three decades, and the trend is one of continuing improvement. However, the disparities in literacy attainment between men and women (as well as between urban and rural populations) remain a major issue.

Surprisingly, the gender gap in literacy among the present younger generation is even larger than that of their grand-parents or even parents. Whether this is the result of selective out-migration of literate individuals from the countryside to the towns, or of insufficient educational access and quality in rural areas, is a question with profound policy implications, and requires further investigation. It clearly shows that males have received more education than females during this time period. Results of the study suggest that part of the explanation for high levels of illiteracy in rural areas is the relative frequency of households in which both parents are illiterate, while in the urban areas men are more likely to marry a woman who has some literacy skills. The evidence indicates that completely illiterate households are by far more likely to raise illiterate children, while maternal literacy positively affects both boys’ and girls’ enrollment and attainment. Adapted from: Lavy, et al. (1995).

**Oman**

The magnitude of the problem of illiteracy in the region often blinds us to the success stories where countries are succeeding against great odds to, not only reduce the illiterate people, but are also adopting and implementing strategies to improve and modernize education as a whole, and involving government and social sectors in doing so. Oman is one such country.

In Oman the concentration since 1999 has been on closing the literacy gender gap and the geographic disparities. In the area of girls’ and women’s education, where customs and traditions form one of the main barriers, the inclusion of such topics as

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21 [http://www-sop.inria.fr/rodeo/boudani/morocco.html](http://www-sop.inria.fr/rodeo/boudani/morocco.html) (Welcome to Morocco, Official Site)
23 [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org) /wef/en-leadup/findings_literacy (adapted from Lavy, 1995)
health, nutrition, family education, life skills, child care and motherhood, have been successful in changing popular attitudes and have secured public acceptance for literacy and education for girls and women. Additionally, graduates from literacy programmes are awarded 30 books each, dealing with health, civic education, environment, agriculture, history and heritage and other relevant subjects that will allow them to continue learning.

Moreover, in an effort to raise the status and professional level of literacy education in Oman, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with Sultan Qabous University and other civil and education organizations, have developed a comprehensive, specialized training programme for literacy instructors, on the one hand, and a programme of revising, re-writing, adapting and developing books, literacy materials and teaching methods.24

The collaboration between the government, higher education and civil society has been considered one of the many contributing factors to the success of the project.

**Box 8**

**Oman: A Success Story**

The experience of Oman illustrates not only one of the reasons for the high percentage of illiteracy in the region, but also serves as a case study on ways of overcoming it. It must be noted that, considering the level at which Oman had started the progress made has been quite impressive.

Oman began building its entire educational system, as well as its civil social structures, in the early 1970s. Therefore, despite the fact that the country lags behind in many aspects, it has come a long way. In 1975 the Government of Oman drew up successive five-year-plans for formal education, which included building schools, importing teachers and skilled education personnel from other Arab countries and developing a curriculum. Aiming at a homogenous educational system in a distinctly non-homogenous tribal society of ethnic minorities and large non-urban populations was one of the greatest challenges. The educational system also aimed at educating women (unheard of before 1970), modernizing society, addressing technological challenges, providing professional skills for exploiting the country’s natural resources, and achieving national unity.25

The Omani educational strategy to achieve literacy was firmly based in the principles of lifelong learning, and was considered a priority for achieving social and economic development. Therefore, literacy activities involved, and still does to this date, a wide range of actors, namely: the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Information (education via mass media was started in 1980), the Omani Women’s Association. It also represented one of the major examples of regional cooperation, in that the Omani government sought help in training, curriculum development, and administration from Egypt, Bahrain, Sudan and Saudi Arabia.

Since 1970, Oman has gone from a less than 20% literacy rate country-wide to close to 70%, and is steadily narrowing the gender gap. Literacy centers remain the main training facilities for combating illiteracy. They have flexible timetables and scheduling, and provide either gender segregated classes or co-educational ones depending on the students’ preference. Courses typically last for two years and cover reading, writing, mathematics, Islamic studies, general education, and family skills offered to women only. General education includes geography, history, national matters, simple sciences, and environmental education. Family skills courses include such subjects as maternal health, hygiene, nutrition, early childcare, family health, dressmaking and running a household.26

Although women’s attendance at these classes remains high, recently men have begun to drop out and lose interest in literacy. A national commission has been set up to investigate the reasons and deal with the problems.

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24 Non-formal Education for Girls, Rafika Hammoud, UNESCO Beirut, 2001

25 [http://www.literacyexchange.net/oman](http://www.literacyexchange.net/oman)

26 Oman Information Center, [http://www.omaninfo.com](http://www.omaninfo.com)
Palestinian Territories

In Palestine, according to a brief submitted to UNESCO Beirut by the Palestinian National Authority, there is no national programme specific to adult education as yet, although there is a National Illiteracy Reduction programme. However, adult education is an integral part of the Palestine Education for All National Plan. Policies concerning adult education have not been unified or centralized under one authority or body, but are part of the Ministry of Education and Higher Learning’s priorities.

Additionally, the adult education programme in Palestine dates its inception to the Hamburg conference. Before 1997 there were very few adult education efforts apart from literacy, which was handled by civil society and non-governmental education. The development of specific programmes and curricula for adult learners was started in 1999. After Hamburg the Ministry of Education and Higher Learning attempted to incorporate all the 10 theme areas into adult education planning and curriculum development.

Adult Education in Palestine is seen as social responsibility and the need to collaborative action is considered of utmost importance. It is currently dealt with by, in addition to the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour in collaboration with labour unions, universities and women’s organizations.

Priorities in adult education in Palestine include reduction of illiteracy, dealing with school drop outs, providing skills and vocational training to workers, upgrading the skills and knowledge of university graduates and professionals in keeping with the changing labour market, empowering women through life skills and rights education.

The National Illiteracy Reduction Programme priorities include basic education, literacy, women’s education, and information technology for adults and targets refugees, people with special needs, people in rural areas. Depending on the needs of the targeted groups issues other issues are added to the curriculum, such as environmental education, health education, life skills, and citizenship education.

As for youth and school dropouts, (15-18), programmes include, in addition to literacy where needed, basic education and life skills. The curriculum and books have been prepared and the teachers have been trained and implementation is expected to begin in September 2003, the situation permitting.

Teacher training for adult education and literacy includes topics such as the psychology of adult learners, communications skills, using information technology and measuring and evaluating of learners achievements, the curriculum, teaching methods. Teachers receive a stipend or honorarium but no salary.

Generally speaking, monitoring and evaluations takes place through visits to the centers, the monthly reports sent by center administrators to the Ministry, regular phone contact between the Ministry and centers to keep abreast of the developments and needs. Additionally, both teachers and learners are given questionnaires to evaluate the teaching and learning process and make suggestions for improvements.

However, there remains one major hurdle to improving and developing adult education and education as a whole in the Palestinian territories, and that is the unstable political and often explosive military situation, which has resulted in school and road closures, curfews and the threat of danger.
Saudi Arabia

The government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has set a number of policies and strategies for adult education both in accordance with international trends and to meet national priorities; hence the emphasis on women’s education and literacy for the 15 years and over population. Post-CONFINTEA, Saudi Arabia began to encourage civil society, charitable organizations to play a more prominent role in those two areas; while at the same time encouraging the private sector to play an active role in professional skills training and upgrading.

The National Literacy Programme of Saudi Arabia is estimated to reach 102,411 people a year of the over 15 population. Part of this Programme is a ten-year plan in which implementation began early in 2003. The plan targets primarily the 10-45 age group, while also trying to reach older adults and ensuring that all those under 10 years of age are enrolled in school. The ultimate goal of the ten-year plan is to make the Kingdom virtually illiteracy-free by 2013—which coincides with the United Nations Literacy Decade. The strategy specifies the right to literacy for all those living on Saudi soil.

The Saudi strategy is based on targeting illiterate populations per geographical area, starting with a study of the area, its illiterate population, their gender, their literacy needs and ways of responding to them.

Parallel, equivalency programmes for literacy programme graduates and for school dropouts are offered in night schools throughout Saudi Arabia. These programmes aim at integrating this population into the formal education system depending on their levels of attainment. Additionally, post-literacy includes vocational and technical training programmes run by the General Association for Technical and Vocational Education and Training in collaboration with the private sector in order to meet the needs of qualified technical and vocational labour forces and to increase the contribution of the private sector in meeting the educational priorities of the Kingdom.

The government has been working on expanding literacy programmes and enhancing their quality. No age limit has been imposed on those who wish to take advantage of literacy classes offered. This has removed the stigma and embarrassment particularly for those older adults who are illiterate. The full programme is three years long by the end of which learners receive a basic education certificate. This certificate entitles the graduates to continue their education in the formal education system in special night classes for men and day classes for women.

Radio, television, mosques and community centers are also being used to deliver literacy in Saudi Arabia. Financial incentives and promises of employment are used to encourage people in remote areas to join literacy classes.

Since the beginning of 1999, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Labour and the Saudi armed forces have joined together in an effort to eradicate illiteracy in the Kingdom. The Ministry of Defense and the Air Force have also been active in some areas, and within certain remote communities, in providing more flexible times and relevant programmes, which have resulted in almost 100% attendance at literacy classes, according to the Ministry of Education.
Sudan

More specifically directed at women is the Sudanese Open Learning Organization’s (SOLO) REFLECT approach to literacy, which is primarily targeting refugees in Kesla.

The approach involves community members in the development of the literacy lesson through activities related to their development needs. REFLECT is an acronym standing for Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques. The REFLECT approach uses a combination of the theory of Paulo Freire and the group methods of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) to combine the literacy process and the empowering process through people-centered grass roots development. Some of the key points of the approach are:

- Literacy is a process, not a skill to be developed.
- The adult learners are active participants, not passive recipients.
- The PRA techniques are the tools to enable a group of people to assess their felt needs, and investigate a theme of interest to the group of learners.
- Focus is on learner-generated materials (not prepared primers and other materials). Emphasize writing rather than passive reading of fixed texts.
- The literacy events relate to the wider environment rather than simply a classroom activity.
- A group facilitator (rather than a teacher) helps develop learner-generated ideas from graphic forms to written records of what they themselves have discussed.

Box 9

Sudan's Post-literacy success story (SOLO)

The Distance Education post-literacy programme in Sudan has been described as “one of a kind”. It has been in effect since 1999 and will be due for evaluation by 2004.

“The Distance Education infrastructure is being used to deliver a participatory post literacy programme in Sudan. In 1998 the International Extension College (IEC) formed a partnership with the Sudan Open Learning Organisation (SOLO), to develop, raise funds for and implement an ambitious post literacy programme.

The aim of the project is to provide educational services to refugees and displaced people in Sudan. It does this using distance education and includes in its provision both formal and non-formal courses, ranging from primary health care campaigns to teacher education and from literacy to O levels. The headquarters is in Khartoum with a regional office in Gedaref, in the East, which serves the Ethiopian and Eritrean refugee populations.

It was designed to meet the need for reading materials suitable for adult learners in the refugee, displaced and local Sudanese communities. It aims ‘to have several thousand more people who live in Sudan (refugees and displaced people, women and men) reading on a daily basis than were doing so’ in 1999. The programme illustrates some of the potential of the distance education infrastructure.

It is being accomplished through the following activities:

- Upgrading SOLO’s existing print shop equipment
- Expanding SOLO’s staff by the addition of a Commissioning Manager, a Post-Literacy Coordinator and 28 Community Liaison Workers
- Training new and existing staff in the skills and knowledge needed to run a successful educational publishing house that contributes to building literacy skills
- Producing 50 titles, which provide both a focus for on-the-job training for the staff of SOLO and a tangible contribution to the work of post-literacy in Sudan in essence the project divides into two discrete parts, which are mutually dependent, and is only possible because it builds on SOLO’s distance education infrastructure.
The first part is the development of the Press. SOLO already had an experienced and relatively well-trained cadre of individuals able to design and print educational materials in a variety of languages. By adding equipment with a greater capacity and recruiting someone with business experience, it has been possible to build on SOLO’s reputation and network to the point where the Press has the capacity to fulfill not only its own printing needs but those of a number of large clients. The income from SOLO Press is being put back into SOLO’s educational programming, helping to secure SOLO’s financial future and making it possible to plan longer term for some of the most disadvantaged and underserved populations in Sudan. Even now, in the third year of BLSF, the Press is funding 50% of the in country costs of the programme and is on schedule to contribute 75% in year 4, as well as making significant financial input to SOLO’s other costs.

The second part, the development from scratch and production of a range of books, manuals, newspapers, magazines and other materials, in Arabic, Tigrinya and other local languages, is being undertaken in the following way.

Twenty-eight reading and writing circles, with approximately 1800 participants in total, are distributed in camps for the internally displaced in Khartoum and Gezira States and for refugees in Gedaref and Kassala States. Each circle is facilitated by a Community Liaison Worker and managed overall by the Post-Literacy Coordinator.

The project is enabling the newly literate refugees and displaced Sudanese who make up these circles to write and publish their own stories. The volume and range of writing produced in the groups has been impressive. A comprehensive commissioning process enables project staff and beneficiaries to choose which stories/articles go on for publication.

A recent review (Barnett et al, 2001) of the project indicates that a high level of community activity has occurred as a result of the group writing activity. The review shows that having a forum within which to write has enabled people to raise issues which are of concern and importance to them and their community.

On occasion whole circles have mobilised to create change such as building drainage systems, carrying out income generating activities and raising awareness of health issues. At an individual level people are writing letters to family, reading to children, reading newspapers and teaching family and friends how to read and write.

The geographical spread of the programme is enormous for what is essentially a face-to-face rather than distance education undertaking. It takes 8 hours to drive from Khartoum to Kassala on metalled roads; the camps themselves are usually another hour or two drive into the desert. SOLO has been able to reach out over this distance only because it has the regional office and local study centres from which to do it. To be able to move in these areas of Sudan official permission and documentation must be sought – as it has become more or less routine over the years such permission, though time consuming and at times costly, has been relatively easy to get. Journeys are planned to be multipurpose so that various SOLO programmes can piggyback and keep costs down.

One of the most critical stages in the operation was the establishment of the circles within the communities—not so difficult for SOLO, being part of the local network made it relatively straightforward to recruit Community Liaison Workers from the local community.

SOLO has been able to call on its writers, editors, printers, transport and delivery system, tutor and monitoring visits, face-to-face centres, sports, sewing and computer equipment, library resources, audio equipment and plans to use the radio expertise it gained doing health campaigns to broadcast some of the stories. In effect it is mobilising all the distance education resources it has at its disposal for the benefit of a participatory programme based in the local community.27

27 Dr. Felicity Binns, Executive Director, International Extension College, Cambridge, UK, described the project in a paper presented at the Pan Commonwealth Conference, Durban, July 2002.
Syria

An impressive record in combating illiteracy is in Syria. In the early 1980s, according to Syrian Ministry of Education sources, the illiteracy rate in Syria was close to 58%. By 2000, literacy among the 15 years old and over had reached an estimated 80%. This success is attributed to the implementation of a government policy aimed at “binding the educational process to global development issues in order to meet the challenges….” Therefore, the approach was to emphasize technical and scientific skills training along with basic literacy.28

Based on this policy, a ten-year plan was prepared. The main targets of this plan were the 13 to 45 year olds. Literacy programmes were delivered through media (radio and television), cultural (or community) centers and were aimed at teaching “reading, writing and calculation skills in order to produce efficient members of society”.29

Although books specifically designed for adult literacy were produced, along with teachers’ guidebooks and teacher training, much of what was being taught drew heavily from the Quran, while some of it was ideological in nature.

One of the main factors of the success of literacy programmes in Syria is the strong post-literacy component included and which is based on the Arab Literacy and Adult Education Organization (ARLO) post-literacy strategies. In addition to the newly literate, semi-literate and vocational skilled- and semi-skilled workers were included in the post literacy programmes. Additionally, literacy programmes for the girls and women between the ages of 13 and 29 (including mothers) were compulsory, with each course lasting from three to nine months.

At the legislative level, the Syrian government is being very strict about enforcing the compulsory basic education laws and in ensuring that as few as possible students drop out of the formal education system.

Research conducted by the Syrian University has shown that 40% of those who complete literacy programmes in Syria revert to illiteracy in less than three years either through disuse of their learned skills or due to the absence of a supportive environment. Many do not experience an appreciable change in their social or economic status and therefore become discouraged.

Therefore, in addition to ensuring professional teacher training for adult literacy teachers and improving the quality of books and teachers’ guides, the Syrian government has extended ensuring quality education to the post-literacy stage. Reading centers have been established, ensuring a comfortable and appealing environment for the newly literate. Books of all kinds are being adapted for newly literate readers.

In the early 1990s, the Syrian Ministries of Education and of Culture redefined the aim of adult education as more than the achievement of basic literacy, but as a first step toward each individual’s opportunity to participate in social and economic growth. A new strategy was developed to include a component of vocational education within the literacy and basic education curriculum for adults, both male and female, as well as a component of science and technology.

28 www.literacyexchange.net
Literacy programmes were thus revised, updated and upgraded in 1998. Literacy programmes came to include reading, writing, mathematics, health and environmental education, basic demographics and geography, social issues and economy.

An evaluation of the literacy programmes in 2000 revealed the following data. For those aged 10 and above, a decline of illiteracy rate from over 21.5% in 1990 to 17.4% in 1995. The male illiteracy rate then was 9.4%, falling to 7.1% in 1998. In the same 1995-1998 period, female illiteracy rate decreased from 25.9% to 22%. In urban areas the male/female rates sank to 5.7 and 15.7%, while in rural areas the 1998 figures were 8.5 and 28.4%.

It is important to point out that despite the improvement in literacy rates, the Syrian government has declared these results far from satisfactory, according to Minister of Social Development and Labour, Mrs. Ghada al-Jabi. (Al-Jabi, 2000).

The qualitative development of adult literacy and post-literacy courses has turned towards the linking of reading and writing skills with vocational issues and culture, in order to achieve better results.

**Tunisia**

The Tunisian government’s adult education strategy was based on the commitments it made at the CONFINTEA 1997 conference and later revised in light of the evaluation that took place in 1999 and the Dakar meeting in 2000. The Tunisian EFA National Plan included adult education and literacy after the 1999 evaluation revealed the 1997 strategy unsuccessful due to the following aspects:

- The lack of partnerships and collaborative relationships with parties concerned with education;
- The weakness or lack of awareness raising about the importance of literacy which resulted in a lack of enthusiasm among illiterate populations to join literacy programmes;
- The extreme poverty of some of the illiterate populations which rendered any learning irrelevant in comparison with earning a meager living;
- The incompatibility between the human and financial resources devoted to literacy and adult education programmes and the goals and targets set;
- The lack of sufficient training among those responsible for literacy and adult education.

In light of these results, and taking advantage of the work being done on the EFA National Plan, more realistic, achievable and measurable goals were set. These included reducing illiteracy from 27% in 1999 to 20% in 2004; giving priority to those under 30; concentrating on girls and women; targeting rural areas; giving priority to the 10 provinces identified in 1999 evaluation as having the highest concentration of illiterates.

In addition, the Tunisian government established the General Authority for Literacy by presidential decree. The Authority was given the status on ministry in decision making, funding and exercising political will in order to achieve the most promising results in reducing the levels of illiteracy in Tunisia.
United Arab Emirates

A study to determine the size of the problem of illiteracy, the success of efforts undertaken so far, as well as to evaluate programmes and identify follow-up actions was conducted in the United Arab Emirates in 2000\textsuperscript{30}.

Some of the main issues examined by the study were the high rate of drop out and how to deal with it, and the reasons behind the lack of motivation among literacy learners, as well as the issue of teacher training.

The study resulted in a number of measures being taken. These include designing programmes for the reduction of functional illiteracy among skilled and semi-skilled workers, and tying these programmes to the overall vocational training curriculum. Eventually, both literacy and vocational education programmes would be integrated into a comprehensive educational programme to ensure more productive participation in the labour market.

Another measure taken as a result of the study, was the design of an educational and literacy curriculum for hard-to-reach populations, including those living in remote areas and nomadic tribes that are on the move, which would include the use of innovative techniques and new technologies.

The first programme has been put into practice in cooperation with the adult education commission and under the supervision of a special committee headed by the Minister of Education and Youth, and with participation from women’s and civil society organizations to help in the delivery of programmes.

The second, however, has not yet been implemented as the mechanisms and techniques for reaching these hard-to-reach populations have not yet been determined.

Yemen

The department responsible for adult education and illiteracy eradication in Yemen developed a five-year plan (2000-2005) based on a national strategy for eradicating the illiteracy of 4,450 million Yemeni citizens. The plan included developing a new curricula and books dealing with Islamic studies, Arabic language, mathematics, and general education. The limited number of books was printed in the first year of the plan, piloted, and evaluated.

There is no information available as to the results of the pilots or the evaluation criteria and mechanisms used. However, a larger printing and wider distribution of the books has been under way and they are being used nation-wide.

The Adult Education and Literacy organization of the Yemeni government was established in 1992 with the primary responsibility for the eradication of illiteracy. It came to define adult education in broader terms after CONFINTSEA 1997, to include all aspects of cultural, social, economic, political and professional education. From this definition, the organization drew up a long-term national strategy for adult education. Literacy, however, remained the focal point of this strategy, with both quantitative (4,867,545 illiterates aged 10-45, targeted in 20 provinces) and qualitative (tying the illiteracy eradication programmes to the over all social and

\textsuperscript{30} Non-Formal for Girls in the Arab Region, Rafika Hammoud, UNESCO Beirut, 2001
economic development plan of the Yemeni government). This strategy was officially adopted by the government in 1998.

Both Yemen and Oman had very much the same starting point where literacy and general education are concerned. However, the illiteracy rate for men in Yemen is over 50% and for women over 65%, while only 17% of the population over 10 years of age has completed primary education. Although there has been considerable expansion in education over the past decade, the educational system still suffers from shortfalls in enrolment, absorption and retention of students, and favours males and urban areas to females and rural and agricultural areas. It is estimated that, if the deficit of 80,000 classrooms is not dealt with immediately, some 3 million children aged 6 to 13 will not have a place in schools by 2020. Enrolment rates vary from 75% in some governorates to less than 37% in highly populated, poor and rural governorates. Overall, however, Yemen has the lowest enrolment rate in the Middle East and North Africa, standing at 56%, combined with the highest population growth in the world.\(^{31}\)

There are a number of factors responsible for this, economics and deeply rooted traditional and cultural beliefs being chief among them. In terms of economics, Yemen does not have the natural resources and wealth of Oman. Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the region, although there has been some improvement in the mid 1990s with onset of oil production.

Another factor is that there has been little attention given to educational infrastructure, which has affected access to education. Moreover, although a UNESCO Education Survey 1997-1998, found that the pool of teachers available is not adequate to service the population, there are less than 20% female teachers which is an important consideration when sending girls to school in a traditional conservative society, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, teacher training is inadequate, teacher absenteeism very high, and supervision and administrative support for teachers is irregular at best. Add to that the low number of schools, which result in exceptionally large class sizes and increased pressure on teachers. This has greatly affected the quality of education in Yemen\(^{32}\).

IV. Adult Education after CONFINTEA V

The examples included below deal with only a few of the countries about which some detailed information is available. This in no way means that policies and national action plans are restricted to only those countries in the region, but that this was the information accessible at the writing of this report.

**United Arab Emirates**

In the United Arab Emirates, legislation has included curriculum development and the quality of adult education, as well as legislating programmes for the development of adult education administration within the ministry of education. The comprehensive 20-year plan for education in the UAE includes both formal education and non-formal adult education. Implementation of the plan began in 2000 in five-year increments. The comprehensive plan has been named 2020 Vision for Education.

In a five-year plan (2000-2005), the Ministry of Education and Youth adopted the following programmes and projects:

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- Developing a comprehensive curriculum for the completion of intermediate and secondary education for adults who have not had a chance to join or who have dropped out of the formal education system. The curriculum includes Islamic studies, Arabic and English languages, mathematics, general education and life skills for women.
- Adopting a plan for curriculum evaluation and improving the books and educational materials for adults, as well as improving evaluation mechanisms.
- Improving the administrative structures governing adult education programmes and delivery in the Ministry. This includes:
  o the development of specific national educational indicators, mechanisms and measures;
  o the development of research and studies into education;
  o the development of educational guidebooks for teachers and teacher training;
  o a programme for developing and strengthening the capacity of human resources working in adult education;
  o a programme for improving the educational environment at adult education centers.

A) Learning and Democracy

Some countries in the region have recently begun to include concepts of citizenship, freedom of expression, tolerance and political participation in a select number of literacy materials. These countries include Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria and United Arab Emirates to some extent. However, any treatment of democracy and citizenship rights has been restricted to lessons “embedded” in general educational materials.

When asked about “Learning and Democracy” in adult education, many NGOs responded by describing their own relationships with governments in terms of participation in the decision-making process regarding adult education policies, strategies and the implementation of programmes.

It is clear from those responses that these concepts have not yet become crystallized in the adult education agenda in the Arab region.

B) Improving the Conditions and Quality of Adult Learning

The Hamburg Agenda for the Future defined the above priority theme area as “creating conditions for the expression of people’s demand for learning”, and provided a number of actions aimed at fulfilling this condition, such as enacting legislation and policies ensuring people’s right to education and taking into consideration the critical role of the learning environment; and improving the quality of learning by ensuring the relevance and appropriateness of teaching materials.

At the governmental and policy level in the Arab region, the majority of countries considered this theme one of the top priorities in their adult programmes. Countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen have combined EFA Goal number 3 dealing with ensuring equitable access to quality education for all and CONFINTEA themes on ensuring universal access and improving quality of adult education into their policies and activities on quality education.
Egypt
In Egypt, the improvement of the quality of adult education was part of the government's strategy in creating the General Authority for Adult Education and Eradication of Illiteracy. The Authority's mandate on this issue was to coordinate with adult education university departments in matters of research into quality education, and engage experts in planning curricula, organizing seminars and conferences, designing books and teaching materials.

In the area of access, one of the major successes has been in using the media and specialized TV channels to reach as many people as possible.

Lebanon
The national adult education programme in Lebanon, concentrated on building and strengthening the capacity of staff at educational service centers to enable them to play a more effective role in illiteracy eradication.

Teacher training and curriculum development to meet the needs of various target groups according to their priorities and social and economic needs formed an important element of ensuring quality. Additionally, new mechanism for short term, periodic assessment and evaluation of programme, as well as comprehensive evaluation of all programmes activities were put in place.

A plan is underway to make evaluation a core element of every teaching, training and learning activity.

United Arab Emirates
Ensuring quality education in the United Arab Emirates takes into account teachers, learners and the learning environment. Literacy teachers are encouraged to find new and innovative ways of delivering the material to learners, and to determine the required mastery levels of the materials depending on the learners’ needs. Teachers are also encouraged to participate in curriculum development and suggest extra-curricular activities that will encourage learning. Evaluation of adult literacy programmes and curricula is based on learners’ attainment of mastery levels set by the teacher.

In terms of the learning environment, the government has built independent adult education centers rather than the school buildings of the formal education system. These centers have been provided with equipment and facilities suitable for adults as well as trained staff members.

C) The right to Learning and Literacy: Basic Education

In the context of the right to education countries in the region had adopted and committed themselves to this concept prior to CONFINTEA 1997. As evidenced by the Arab Framework for action in 2000—the past two decades have witnessed an expansion of primary education to absorb the increasing numbers of school-age children. Enacting legislation for the universalization of compulsory basic education has also proven the depth of the region’s commitment to education.

However, expanding and universalizing education has not solved the problem of school drop out. (An issue that has a great deal to do with the quality of education and its inability to respond to the needs of all learners.)
Within the general framework of the Education for All National Plans, countries in the region have included lifelong learning, the education of women and girls, as well as strategies for providing equivalent and parallel educational services for dropouts and out of school youth.

**Algeria and the UAE** are two countries that have combined literacy and basic education to absorb the numbers of illiterates and school drop outs into educational programmes. The strategy behind this policy of tying literacy to basic education is an attempt to open up opportunities to allow both groups to continue their education after attaining basic literacy and completing their primary education. It is also an attempt to tie the non-formal education system to the formal education system in order to allow a greater chance for the newly literate and those who have regained lost reading, writing and mathematics skills to rejoin the formal education system and continue their education.

**Lebanon**

In Lebanon, although the law on universal, compulsory basic education has come into effect, enforcement mechanisms are not yet in place. A collaborative research project is currently underway between the Ministry of Education and the National Center for Educational Research and Development to identify the factors that lead to the high rate of drop out.

Preliminary information suggests that the drop out has increased in the past few years due to the deteriorating economic situation in the country, which has forced many youths to join the labour market. Additionally, although basic education is universal, free and compulsory, it is free only in theory, as parents still have to assume the cost of books and registration fees, which many have become increasingly unable to afford. Adult education programmes are targeting out of school youth in an attempt to help them catch up to and rejoin the formal education system.

**Palestine**

In Palestine, too, adult education and literacy programmes are targeting dropouts and out-of-school youth. An intensive parallel curriculum, mirroring that of the formal education system, with special emphasis on some subjects, has been developed. At the end of this intensive programme, learners are required to sit for an exam. The certificate gained allows learners to re-join the formal education system at the 10\textsuperscript{th} grade. An age limit of 18 has been imposed on those who wish to rejoin the formal system. Those over the age of 18 are channelled toward vocational and technical education.

**Sudan**

A pilot programme for the education of children from 8 to 14 years has been implemented in Sudan. This includes school dropouts and children who had never attended school. The programme was devised to respond to the growing number of out-of-school children, particularly girls in rural areas, and the inability of formal basic education to absorb these numbers. In addition to basic literacy, this programme includes life skills, nutritional, environmental and health education, as well as practical skills by which youth will be able to make a living and respond to the growing need for skilled labour in Sudan\textsuperscript{33}.

\textsuperscript{33} Non-formal Education for Girls, Rafika Hammoud, UNESCO, Beirut, 2001
Syria
A similar attempt is being made in Syria to integrate vocational training into the literacy programmes and to ensure that those who are interested, ready and capable are then integrated into the formal education system post-literacy.

D) Empowerment of Women

In some Arab countries there has been an attempt to take advantage of work already being done at the national level as part of the Education for All initiative. Having established that literacy, and especially literacy and education for girls and women, are a priority for all Arab countries, although to varying degrees, many countries have seen that tying in with goals of EFA included in their National Plans is an effective way of achieving results.

Of particular relevance are goals 4 and 5 of the Dakar Framework for Action, which were recognized as priorities for the region and emphasized in the Arab Framework for Action resulting from the Cairo 2000 Assessment.

- 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.
- Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement of basic education of good quality.

Egypt

In keeping with above EFA goals and in an attempt to ensure adult education is accessible and available to women and girls, particularly in rural areas, the Egyptian government, along with the General Authority for Adult Education and Literacy, and in collaboration with UNICEF, has established “community schools”. The aim of community schools is to provide educational services in rural and remote communities, particularly literacy, basic education and life skills education to women and girls. The establishment of community schools within traditional communities and in the areas of concentration of women’s illiteracy, has allowed for, not only direct access for women and girls to educational services, but also for overcoming some of the barriers that impeded girls’ education in poor and traditional societies.

These barriers include the fact that primary education in Egypt is free in theory only rather than in practice. A primary school child costs at a minimum the equivalent of $10 upon entering school. Since most families cannot afford this amount, their limited expenditure on schooling favours boys. Another reason is the need to travel some distance away from home to attend school, which hampers female enrollment. Families would rather keep girls close to home fearing for their personal safety, and where they can be useful in domestic chores. There are a number of cultural factors involved as well, such as early marriage of girls and need to segregate girls and boys34.

Community schools and one-room schools in which girls and women are able to learn together have helped provide women with a variety of skills as well as literacy, including embroidery weaving, sewing, painting on glass, hand crafts, animal husbandry, food preservation, dairy production. This has enabled women to

contribute to their families’ income, which has been looked upon favourably by the community at large.

**Lebanon**

A new programme targeting women has been established by the Ministry of Social Affairs, which includes women’s rights issues, violence against women and ways of dealing with domestic violence. To date 1,200 women have made use of the programme, either as part of a comprehensive literacy programme or as a separate course entitled “How to Stand Up to Aggression Against Women”.

**Morocco**

The Ministry of Education in Morocco and UNESCO have cooperated in providing the appropriate environment and curriculum for girls in rural areas. Schools have been rehabilitated and refurbished, supplied with running water and electricity. Gardens in which the girls can plant vegetables and other produce have been created, and special pens for domestic animals. Additionally, girls have been provided with safe and supervised transportation to these schools. The curriculum includes agriculture, carpentry, sewing, and electrical work, pottery.

Teachers have been trained to deal with the needs of learners and apply the new curriculum; schedules have also been modified to accommodate rural life. Market day in the villages has become part of the learning experience, in that learners are taught to market and sell their produce and crafts.

These programmes have been enthusiastically embraced by the entire community and would not have been possible without the close cooperation of the government, civil society institutions and UNESCO.

**Yemen**

The national report presented by Yemen at the regional meeting in Hammamat, Tunis, indicates a number of ministerial decrees in 1998, 1999, 2000 dealing with women and girls’ right to education, the social status of women, women’s economic rights, as well as a national strategy for the advancement of women (2003-2005). The focus of most of these decisions has been on closing the gender gap in education, concentrating on women’s literacy in rural areas, and designing literacy and educational programme specifically for women. In this context, therefore, the Adult Education and Literacy body has so far established 44 literacy and adult training centers for women. The aim of the programmes delivered at those centers, in addition to providing women with basic literacy, is to provide them with the necessary skills to improve their economic status through a number of vocational and life skills training programmes. Also in response to the national strategy for women, an adult education curriculum specifically for women was designed and books published dealing with basic literacy in two stages; post-literacy; health and disease prevention; family planning, pre- and post-natal health; women’s health and nutrition.

**Syria**

During the 1990s, the Ministry of Culture in Syria implemented a series of experimental literacy projects for women in co-operation with the General Women’s Union, ALECSO, and UNESCO. The projects focused on literacy and vocational training for rural women and took place in five major cities.

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24 Non-formal Education for Girls, Rafika Hammoud, UNESCO Beirut, 2001
The curriculum comprised a combination of basic literacy, life skills training, vocational training, general and cultural education. Part of the effects was that women were able to use their new literacy skills in furthering their vocational training, which in turn increased their motivation to participate in more advanced literacy courses.

The components of the projects were as follows:

Pre-sessions training
- Awareness raising about the importance of the education and training opportunities being offered and their effects on women's lives.
- Training sessions for male and female teachers in adult education.
- Training sessions for teachers in subject matter.

For women learners the curriculum included:
- Effective field application of the skills learned.
- Field cultivation, growth stages and follow up.
- Preparation of dairy products.
- Appropriate conservation methods.
- Production of dairy product derivatives.
- Fruits dehydration and conservation methods.
- Households economics, commercial calculations, and cooperatives.
- First aid.
- Child care from infancy to adulthood.
- General education and culture seminars, which include health education, social, economic and monetary issues (bookkeeping, banking…etc), and legal awareness.
- Vocational education, which involves free, individual reading of booklets dealing with subjects directly related to the women’s daily life. These booklets are published within adults' education series* (Ministry of Education 2000).

In the early 90s two pilot centers for women vocational training were established in Busra and Al-Rastan, implemented by a coalition of the General Women's Union, AGFUND, UNICEF, and UNDP.

The Supreme Committee for Literacy's National Plan aimed at eradicating illiteracy by the year 2001. In short, this overall strategy targeted males and females aged 13-45, with special efforts made in highly illiterate provinces. Young illiterate girls between 13 and 19 years and young mothers aged 20 to 29 were considered a priority. Participation in the programmes was made compulsory and lasted between three (post-literacy only) and nine months (basic literacy plus post-literacy), depending on the individual’s skills and level of literacy. The plan also included strategies for promoting independent ongoing learning, and to encourage neo-literates to join further education activities.

E) World of Work

Lebanon
In Lebanon, “learning for the world of work” has been an fairly recent inclusion on the adult education agenda developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs. It has included vocational education for both men and women, focusing on skills training for both literate and illiterate adults and out-of-school youths. Additionally, since 1998, programmes focusing on Computer Training and Information Technology, and English Language have become part of adult education programme. “How to
Establish Your Own Business” has trained and graduated 600 women in the last two years.

Qatar
Adult education for women in Qatar has been focusing increasingly on the world of work and lifelong learning. The reason for this is the substantial increase in the number of women with post-secondary and university degrees, but the lack of work opportunities open to them within the country. This is partly due to traditional values and customs that have restricted women’s education to a limited number of disciplines and their work opportunities to a small number of professions. Adult education programmes targeting women, have been aiming at making up for this by training women in modern technologies and preparing to join the changing labour market.

Yemen
In Yemen, the provision of quality adult literacy has meant the inclusion of various forms of vocational education and training within the literacy curriculum such as carpentry, mechanics, construction, metal work and welding, agriculture, and computer literacy for men. For women, the adult literacy curriculum includes home economics, family education, sewing and embroidery, and leather crafts.

F) Environment, Health, Population
Greater awareness has emerged regarding the environment and the necessity of preservation and protection of environmental resources, however, there is no evidence of non-formal education programmes that focus on environment, health or population in the region.

As mentioned in the section on literacy, many of these themes are included in literacy materials. The focus on environment and health targets to a large extent illiterate populations in rural areas. Health education, in particular, is directed at women and focuses for the most part on pre- and neo-natal health, childcare, prevention, and nutrition. The same goes for population, where the focus has been narrowed down to family planning and is very much part of family and women’s health issues.

G) Media, Culture and Information Technology
Media has been used as a tool for literacy and awareness raising in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates.

Computer courses at the post-literacy level are being offered in Lebanon, Egypt and a number of Gulf countries. A recommendation by the Arab Network for Literacy and Adult Education and Ain Shams University, to borrow and adapt the Indian experience of “computers for the poor” is currently being studied. The recommendation proposes using inexpensive computers and specific software for self-directed literacy for adults and youth.

H) Groups with Special Needs
At a Conference on disability held in Beirut in October 2002, major trends causing increased instances of disability in the region were identified. Chief among these was the violent conflict shattering people’s lives across the region. The Conference report stated:

“We have an increase in the number of disabled people as a result of violence in Algeria, Sudan, Iraq and Palestine. Disability is also growing as a result of
poverty and malnutrition. A third source of disability is blood marriage, a very common tradition in most Arab countries, which is leading to an increase in mental disability across the Arab world.\textsuperscript{36}

The Conference made a number of recommendations on actions required for the development, advancement and integration of people with disability. Education ranked at the top of those recommendations. Although educational, recreational, developmental and health programmes for disabled children have been on the increase in the region, adults have remained, to certain extent, excluded from these.

Of the national reports received from the 17 countries that attended the Hammamat preparatory meeting, only four mentioned the education of adults with special needs as a priority. These are Egypt, Oman, Palestine, and United Arab Emirates.

All four countries indicated special programmes for people with physical disabilities, including an accessible learning environment, especially trained teachers, adult literacy books printed in Brail, and integration into schools and higher education institutions.

**Palestine**

In Palestine, close cooperation between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs, civil society and non-governmental organizations have led to greater understanding of the needs of people with disability particularly in connection with the learning environment. In 2000 350 schools were made accessible for those with physical disabilities, including evening schools in which adult education classes take place.

The Ministry is currently working on a strategy for the integration of deaf students into the regular classes by providing sign language translation for them. To date there have been only a few experiments in this type of integration.

**United Arab Emirates**

The United Arab Emirates strategy includes training for teachers in First Aid and familiarization with the physical and health difficulties faced by the disabled. Also prominent in that country’s strategy are awareness-raising campaigns at the national, community and family levels about the importance of education for disabled adults.

1) **Economics of Adult Learning**

In response to questions on funding for adult education, NGOs from 17 countries responded overwhelmingly that funding for literacy is adequate, and support for the production and printing of literacy materials is also satisfactory.

Moreover, over the past two decades, the majority of countries in the region have increased their funding to the formal education system in an effort to expand and universalize basic education. Whereas funding for non-formal education, apart from basic literacy and post-literacy, is still lacking.

The basic problem here has been the interest at the policy-making levels, in the issues of lifelong learning as separate from the formal higher education system. However, the problems of illiteracy in the region have been so overwhelming, and governments and NGOs have been struggling to deal with it that other issues have

\textsuperscript{36} \url{http://disabilityworld.org} Official report of the conference, by Nawaf Kabbara, President of the Arab Council for Disability
either fallen by the wayside or have been viewed as luxuries that only countries that have achieved acceptable literacy levels can afford to deal with them.

In short, the above few examples illustrate that many of the official institutions and government departments responsible for adult education and literacy have been active in developing strategies and setting policies to deal with the often overwhelming problem of illiteracy in their countries. Curriculum development and improvement have also been a major part of their strategic plans. However, as is clear also from the above-mentioned examples, although most actions taken have come under the broad title of Adult Education, they concentrate mostly on Literacy and Post Literacy programmes.

Greater awareness of the consequences of such a narrow focus needs to be although its reasons are understood,

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

It is evident from this regional report that there is a deep commitment to adult education in the Arab region. The mid-term review consultations, surveys, analyses, research, meetings, and a host of other activities undertaken in this context, speak of seriousness with which this region views adult education both at the governmental and non-governmental levels.

The report has also revealed that since the Hamburg Conference in 1997, the region not only renewed its commitment to adult education, but also took concrete steps in practically every country to translate this commitment into actions based on the recommendations of CONFINTEA V.

The establishment of the Arab Network for Literacy and Adult Education (ANLAE) that has been identified as one of the major regional responses to CONFINTEA V, is also an expression of that commitment. Its role as a link between governments and NGOs at the national and regional levels, a support for NGO work in the field, and its identified priority of “setting strategies for work in literacy and adult education within the context of lifelong learning” are all essential ingredients for the success of adult education efforts in the region.

Despite the commitment to adult education as articulated through the themes of CONFINTEA V, and despite the adoption of these themes by all countries in the region, the Mid-term review has revealed that for the Arab region as a whole, adult education is still defined as literacy. The concentration of efforts in the field of adult education is on the reduction and eradication of illiteracy. This is not surprising in light of the kind of burden that 70 million illiterate people place human, social and economic development in the region.

However, the themes and priorities identified in CONFINTEA V are being introduced into literacy programmes and curricula across the region. The growing awareness of literacy as a tool to a productive and better quality of life has been radically changing literacy curricula in the region. Vocational education, micro enterprise, health, nutrition, childcare, agriculture, banking and money management have all become a part of literacy programmes. Also notable is the use of media and new technologies to reach as many illiterate populations as possible. Distance and open learning, home schooling, community schooling and family education are all providing choices to meet the different needs.
Education for All has also provided a new impetus for adult education, in particular in the area of women’s education. In many countries the CONFINTEA V theme of empowering women through education and the EFA goal of eliminating gender disparities in education, have merged to make women and girls' education a priority across the board for every country and community in the region without exception.

Women and girls’ literacy programmes are being tailored to overcome cultural and traditional constraints that have in the past excluded women from the educational process. Statistical data reflect the improvements that have been made in women’s literacy levels in the region.

It is worth noting, however, that on CONFINTEA theme number 1, “Adult learning and democracy: challenges for the 21st century”, has been dealt with only from the angle of democratizing the relationship between NGOs and government institutions, giving NGOs a voice, and increasing their participation in policy and decision making. Issues of democracy and political participation at the popular level have not yet made their way into adult education curricula in any noticeable manner.

- Another issue of great importance that has been identified at both the governmental and NGO regional consultations is the lack of reliable documentation on adult and non-formal education. The regional consultation that took place in Hammamat, Tunis strongly recommended that this be considered a priority area for future work and included it in its final report as follows:

There is a need to develop, create and reinforce existing capacities in data collection and documentation on adult and non-formal learning. This is necessary in order to collect, analyze and retrieve information to be used in conducting studies and research, developing curricula and educational materials, and evaluation measurements and instruments particular to the region. This information will be used to enrich the ALADIN Network and the UNESCO website on the Literacy Decade and UIE www.literacyexchange.net

This is not to say that there is no research taking place in the region on adult and non-formal education, but rather that there are no specialized research and documentation centers or institutions taking an interest in adult and non-formal education at the regional level. Therefore, another recommendation that was made at the Hammamat meeting dealt with this issue as follows:

There is a need to identify research centers in the region working in the areas of adult and non-formal education, and create a network that will generate information to help governments make informed policy decisions based on reliable information in order to improve the quality of education at the regional and national levels.

- Curriculum development, monitoring, evaluation were also areas of weakness that emerged in this report and that were tackled at the regional consultation in Hammamat.

There is need to develop pilot systems in the areas of curriculum development and evaluation in a number of Arab countries so that they would serve as the basis for implementation and replication in other countries of the region.
It is necessary to develop common indicators for monitoring and evaluating the quality of non-formal education in the Arab region (literacy, post-literacy, and other adult learning programmes).

The above four recommendations, along with those made by Dr. Fawzi Ayoub in relation to literacy books in the region, and those made by the regional NGO consultation in Cairo, form a clear vision and agenda for future action which needs to be taken up by all parties concerned with adult and non formal education in the region.

It is important also to note that there are barriers to education in the region that are beyond the control of regional expert and government officials, and which require international action and support. Armed conflict, occupation, economic recession in such countries as Iraq, Palestine, Sudan, Lebanon are threatening to derail any progress made over the years in improving literacy levels and providing education for all. If there is to be comprehensive and sustainable development in the region, then these conditions cannot be allowed to continue and persist.