A New Effort for New Times - Steps in the Long March to Belem:

Background Note to the International Conference on
Financing Adult Education for Development

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Convenors and context

This conference is jointly implemented by the following civil society partners: the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE); the Asian South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE); the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and dvv international, the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (DVV), which is organising the 23-24 June 2009 Conference. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) representing the UN specialised agency, and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) joined the partnership.

In November 2007, partners and participants of BoCAED (Bonn Conferences on Adult Education and Development) worked on another theme important for both the global development agenda and the adult education movement worldwide: The Right to Education in the Context of Migration and Integration. (1)

This new gathering on financing was originally planned as a first CONFINTEA VI follow-up meeting to the May 2009 Belem World Conference which included in its programme a Roundtable on Financing, and a Workshop on Financing Adult Education for Development. The Belem conference was postponed to December 2009, so the Bonn conference provides an opportunity to prepare more thoroughly for
this most important part of the CONFINTEA programme. It is also an opportunity to share knowledge on issues of national and international adult education financing; and to inform the International Civil Society Forum (FISC), which is planned to run back-to-back with the World Conference.

The purpose and challenge of this background paper

This paper does not discuss technical issues to do with modes of financing adult education in the development context. That is the job of the meeting itself. Instead it reminds us of how we come to be where we are in 2009, of some of the footsteps and landmarks along the way since internationalism acquired its modern meaning after World War Two.

The paper also sets out to challenge us to confront the reality of our failure – explicable and inevitable as it may have been – to move the subject of our profession, passion and purpose from the periphery to the mainstream of the global development agenda.

The disappointing flourishing of lifelong learning

We can take pride in how far we have come since World War Two, without being complacent about what we have not succeeded in doing. At that time much of the world was still in the thrall of colonialism. Development, development aid, and North-South relations were unheard of. Piaget reigned in the psychology of personal development and it was taken for granted that from early adulthood learning virtually ended and it was all downhill. Schooling for the young, higher education for a tiny minority, and for most people what you achieved by age twenty, or much earlier in practice, determined all that followed thereafter. Clearly we have moved a very long way from there.

With the sixties and the rise of internationalism after the War, great progress was made, from the time of Harold Macmillan’s ‘winds of change’ end-of-colonialism speech: new ideas, new ways of seeing hopes for a better world, development and emancipation taking many forms.

However, despite the blossoming of ‘lifelong learning’ at this time, with early seminal papers from UNESCO, OECD and others, and its almost overnight rhetorical adoption by governments first North and then South, from the mid-nineties, we have seen support for adult education rise but then recede in most national and even international policy agendas. Its public provision has fallen, and its ambitions and horizons have been narrowed.

At the same time the gap narrowed between great wealth and deep poverty, but more recently it has again, often dramatically, widened within and between countries; and the vital and essential role of adult learning in addressing this inequity, along with its personal, social and economic costs, has been brushed aside.
Today, far from being seen as an opportunity, the new fiscal and economic crisis overwhelming the world in past months has merely exacerbated this situation. Political and policy interest in adult learning continues to shrink to a job-training and skills agenda. It largely ignores the essential wider underpinnings of prosperity required and socio-economic good health. Adult education as an urgent social necessity is suffering the same fate as the environmental movement in its response to impending ecological disaster: there is rhetorical acknowledgement and token investment when times are better, but it is brushed aside rather than embraced in policy terms as a road-to-recovery investment when crisis occurs.

Our response

For our part we are perhaps too easily cowed into being grateful for any crumbs for adult learners that fall from the tables of the wealthy, in or out of government, rather than demanding the rights of dispossessed learners. We are too easily tempted to agree to too modest public sector support in today’s unbalanced and unequal public-private-third sector partnership system.

On the other hand, notwithstanding the rightwards swing of Europe in this (June 2009) month’s elections, it seems likely that the extreme excesses of neo-liberalism globally may have reached their limits. It is quite possible that the proper place of the State will come to be recognised and valued once more.

Before we are too modest in our claims - before we are too willing merely to echo what was said 12 and 25 years ago at earlier big UNESCO CONFINTÉA conferences – let us ask what it has cost to bale out one major bank or other enterprise in Europe or the United States. Now compare that with what we might be claiming as proper public subvention to give substance for example to EFA (Education for All) goals three and four. Then perhaps we can be bolder and more confident when the world adult education community reconvenes in Belem.

What is being said during the current economic and financial crisis?

The adult education movement around the globe has followed with keen concern recent information about and discussion following the deepening of the global economic and financial crisis. To judge by responses so far, this may lead to a decrease rather than the desperately needed increase towards the commitments that were made in respect of fulfilment of the agreed development agenda.

Three examples cited from texts of current major meetings help to show this:

- The draft of the outcome document of the UN Conference under preparation for early June this year says: “Developing countries are now bearing the brunt of this crisis, for which they are least responsible. … This crisis put a disproportionate burden on women. Women also face greater income insecurity and increased burdens of family care. The crisis has exacerbated the
challenges and impediments to the attainment of our internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. … Therefore, a much larger share of the additional resources – both short-term liquidity and long-term development financing – will need to be made available to developing countries, especially the low-income countries.” (2)

- The Explanatory Note for the Executive Board of UNESCO for its session in April this year states that “…it is essential to seek mechanisms that would help to ease the hardship that will be faced by the least developed and most disadvantaged countries. … The crisis must not be used as a pretext for cutbacks in public expenditure on or in international aid for education. On the contrary, unshakeable support for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the EFA goals and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), is even more important now than it was before the crisis. Indeed, UNESCO has been requesting governments to invest at least 6% of their gross domestic product in education in order to make up the shortfall of $7 billion a year in resources earmarked for the EFA programme in least developed countries.” (3)

- The December 2008 Oslo Declaration Acting Together stated that “it will be imperative to protect and insulate the world’s poorest children, youth and adults from the worst effects of the crisis, as they carry the least responsibility for these events. The crisis should not serve as justification for any reduction in national spending and international aid to education. … In this context, we reaffirm that education is a fundamental human right, to be respected at all times. It is one of the most effective tools for achieving inclusive and sustainable economic growth and recovery, reducing poverty, hunger and child labour, improving health, incomes and livelihoods, for promoting peace, democracy and environmental awareness. Education empowers individuals with the knowledge, values and skills they need to make choices and shape their future. Universal access to quality basic education and better learning outcomes are the drivers to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. … We therefore agree to better plan and coordinate global advocacy efforts for all six EFA goals. … We urgently call on national governments to allocate adequate domestic resources (4-6% of GNP / 15-20% of public expenditure) to education, on development partners to increase official development assistance in accordance with the Doha declaration, and on all EFA partners to prioritise investment in basic education with a balanced approach to the whole sector.” (4)

Governance structures needed – policy, legislation and financing

The trend has not yet been reversed: youth and adult education and learning, including literacy, are almost neglected in the international development agenda. It is not part of the MDGs. And in international aid and funding, EFA is almost reduced to universal primary schooling.
This paper emphatically is not arguing against the need for all children to go to the best schools possible, after good care and education in early childhood. It is an absolutely wrong and foolish policy error to play off universal primary education against adult learning opportunities. It is very clear however that education should be understood and treated as a fundamental human right throughout life.

Two slogans that have been used in advocacy time and again still serve to dramatise ironically the failure to understand and to act: lifelong learning for the North, and basic education for the South; and EFA translated as Except for Adults.

There is scarcely a government that find it lacks a policy for schools or higher education. Usually there is legislation for both, with (not always adequate) financial provision. It is normally quite different for youth and adult education. Here most Governments fail to do what it necessary: many countries have no significant youth and adult education policies; they may be without legislation, and even if this exists only meagre finances are available. (5)

A false dichotomy

As to literacy skills, we used to think of the ‘three Rs’ - reading, writing and arithmetic, now called numeracy. Today ‘literacy’ is an ever-moving target. We have to add all that is associated with the different levels of information technology required. Competences in computer skills have become almost a prerequisite for our daily life. What office and what company, however small, can do without them?

Computer skills are becoming a general basic skill, just for living as an ordinary citizen as well as obviously for many for vocational purposes. This reminds us of a long known but often forgotten reality: there is not in real life the dichotomy between the general and the vocational which policy-makers appear to love and embrace. We look instead for a continuum in policy-making for the advancement of both, and the bridges between the two, that recognises and respects reality. Today we need to see and provide for the interrelationships much more effectively, since much of the general has immediate impact for the vocational. The whole debate on key competencies and core qualifications is predicated on the importance of the general for the vocational, and vice versa.

Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning, as a slogan, but much more as a real policy, includes all sorts of training and re-training on all levels. It has a key role to play in all matters related to active citizenship and employability. Bridges are needed between formal and non-formal educational institutions, and each provider has to play the appropriate respective role, including schools and universities, companies and training institutions, and civil society organisations of all kinds.
An effect of neo-liberal individualism in the North has been to place responsibility for learning, or failing to learn and to get on, exclusively at the door of the individual, however deprived and excluded they may be. If it is to be more than a rhetorical slogan, lifelong learning means a societal responsibility for creating a learning environment and the necessary resources for all citizens, new and established, young and old.

At a policy level the lifelong learning debate should centre much more on *investing* in people and their education: by governments, employers and the learners themselves. Innovative mechanisms like learners accounts, grant schemes, educational lending and savings, have to be analysed and valued. What kind of implications do these insights have for policy, organisation and financing adult education and training? What sort of structural support do we need? - more financial input to the providing institutions, more incentives for the individuals, or what mix of both?

What is quite clear is that, whatever are the best particular fiscal mechanisms in each time and place, the same principles underlying lifelong learning, and the same policy implications that the concept generates, apply to all peoples in all parts of the world. They should be integral to development strategies universally, and embedded in all policy portfolios, not just those labelled Education, Training etc.

**Principles and partners in funding**

If we are to take financing adult education seriously we cannot expect any institution to do it alone. The sector has lived for some time now with a mixed reality, with contributions from different sources. It is frequently correct and essential to expect a substantial proportion to be paid by Government from public sources, and not only because most of the taxpayers are adults. If one argues for equality in a four pillars approach to lifelong learning in the education sector – schools, vocational training, universities, and continuing education – then adult education is a public responsibility to support adults’ learning.

Once we accept that adults are interested in and need lifelong learning opportunities then we confront a simple reality. The highest numbers of learners are adults, young and older included. Thus adult learning should be numerically the largest part of the education sector. It should therefore receive as much attention as the other sectors or pillars, if not more, even though the quantum of financial support may be distributed differently.

The private sector and many companies therein see the further education and training of their employees as an investment in their human resources, maybe as human capital appreciation. Here again, investment may not be sufficient. Also it is concentrated disproportionately in larger companies, often with nothing in a large but struggling SME (small and medium enterprise) sector. We must clearly state that the privatisation of adult education financing has now exceeded a reasonable limit, whereas one way and another individuals’ and companies’ contribution has always been significant.
Balanced education policy for sustainable development

There has long been ample research evidence from participation rates in adult education programmes to show that the better you are qualified via schooling and university training the more likely it is that you will continue to upgrade your knowledge and skills via adult continuing education lifelong, especially and at least during working life. For this if for no other reason, we oppose playing off the funding of school (or higher) against adult education. Policy and legislation, organisation and finances all require measures that counteract and prevent this playing off. They must support a trend whereby the less successful, and non-participants in adult learning and training, who are more likely to be un- or underemployed, get special attention.

Youth and adult learning and education should foster active citizenship, strengthen personal growth and secure social inclusion. These purposes go far beyond employability. All require education and training in a lifelong perspective. It is not possible to improve the employability of the workforce in a sustainable way without providing good quality in general and vocational training for youth and adults continuously. Nor can one strengthen mobility and support the satisfactory migration of people without training in languages and intercultural skills for both young and older adults.

An aid agenda

Let us return to the international aid agenda. What must be done to ensure that the essential potential contribution of high quality youth and adult education, learning and training gets the support that is needed?

Three years after CONFINTEA V the EFA goals adopted at the Dakar 2000 World Education Forum included the following:

3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

4. 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. (6)

Nine years later, the reality is that youth and adult education and learning are largely ignored in development discourse. There is even less financial support.
Steps to CONFINTEA VI

2007

ICAE has long claimed better financing for adult education, today as in the past. In preparation for CONFINTEA VI, during its 7th World Assembly on *Adults’ Right to Learn: Convergence, Solidarity and Action* in January 2007 in Nairobi, ICAE held a Commission on *Adult Education, Organisation and Financing*, with contributions from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe, from industrialised as well as developing countries. It asserted that:

> Governments need to support policy and legislation for adult education. … There is therefore a need to work together to influence governments on the importance of financing adult education. Furthermore there is a need to explore sources of funding available and to challenge debt sustainability to prioritize social responsibilities. Government and international donors must pay rigorous attention to this.

The presentations and results were documented and circulated widely. (7)

A subsequent ICAE executive meeting determined four priority areas in preparation for CONFINTEA VI:

- poverty, economic inequality, adult learning and vocational education
- the education and learning rights of migrant women and men
- the absolute priority of adult literacy
- policy, legislation and financing.

2008

In early 2008 the ICAE Secretariat organised a virtual seminar around these four themes. This attracted hundreds of participants around the world who commented and sent in materials (see www.icae.org.uy). In May the Leicester seminar synthesised the discussion into a final document, *CONFINTEA VI. Key issues at stake. ICAE public paper*. This was published in a special edition of *Convergence* together with materials from the virtual seminar. (8) The paper added *The necessity of legitimate international monitoring mechanisms* as a follow-up on action and implementation.

An advocacy commission of ICAE was set up during the Leicester meeting to engage with ongoing CONFINTEA preparation. This resulted in the preparation of the International Civil Society Forum FISC, and later in the CONFINTEA VI Civil Society Advocacy Paper with the following “seven key issues to be debated and decided” at CONFINTEA in Belem:
1. Youth and adult education is a fundamental human right. ...  

2. Youth and adult education is crucial for overcoming poverty and for addressing the global food, fuel, environmental and financing crisis. ...  

3. ... Goals 3 and 4 of EFA on youth and adult literacy could no longer be ignored.  

4. Literacy policies must be clearly articulated within a lifelong learning framework and linked to other intersectoral actions and policies. ...  

5. The right to education and lifelong learning for migrant women and men has to be recognized together with the right of refugees. ...  

6. What is needed now is ACTION: appropriate legal and policy frameworks as well as governance structures and mechanisms are necessary to ensure the right of all to youth and adult education. ...  

7. States must demonstrate clear political will and allocate necessary resources for the full exercise of the right of youth and adult education. States and aid agencies must increase their resource allocation to youth and adult education, privatization must be challenged upfront as well as internationally imposed macro economic conditions that undermine investments in education. (9)  

And much earlier – two constant themes  

Looking back one can easily see two streams of continuing interest and concern on the part of ICAE and its members in the past.  

1976  

On the one hand there is the debate on the North and its responsibilities for the South, the role of international cooperation, and the pros and cons of development aid. This has been there from the first ICAE World Assembly in 1976 in Dar es Salaam. The final document from Dar:  

“... recognised that much international assistance in the past has had consequences deeply detrimental to the interests of developing countries... A priority for international assistance should be adult education programmes that contribute to development by the following means:  

- assisting in the building up or strengthening of national systems and structures of education that benefit all people;  
- primarily using indigenous personnel and resulting in the training of such personnel;  
- supporting indigenous cultures and leading to the growth of self-reliance.
Programmes of adult education for development have rarely been supported with international assistance funds. … There are several reasons; negative reasons which must now be turned into positive action:

- Governments in few countries have assessed adult education as of high priority in their development goals or in their requests for funds;
- Few persons who make decisions about social programmes within countries or in international assistance agencies understand the significance and impact of adult education in fostering development;
- Adult education organisations and personnel have not been successful in developing strategies that result in assistance funds…

It is recommended that funding agencies concerned with international development assistance give priority to programmes that:

- develop a strong adult education infrastructure, particularly in countries where adult education is least developed;
- identify levels of training and self-help needs in terms of competence, management, delivery, and evaluation;
- assist workers’ organizations now actively engaged in the organization and development of the rural poor;
- make direct provision for the equal integration of women into social and economic development;
- help the public to understand the momentous issues of the New International Economic Order and of environmental education for survival.” (10)

The 1980s

A decade later ICAE held a seminar in Kungälv, Sweden, on “The Role of International Aid in Adult Education in Developing Countries”. The start of the report has a distinctly contemporary ring:

“In the face of this intense crisis, the perspective which dominates the industrial countries is that emphasis must be placed on economic recovery in the industrial world by eliminating obstacles to development such as high interest rates. This will in turn allow the ‘fuelling’ of the economies of the Third World. Although in somewhat different form, this is once again the implementation of the ‘trickle-down’ theory of development which already has proved to be fallacious. At all levels of social and economic organisation the gap between rich and poor continues to increase.”

The report continues with a section on “Some observations, conclusions and recommendations” which says that:

“We came to recognize the almost invisible, tiny location of adult education in the overall context of aid in the world; that hit us deeply. We would like to propose that this overall structure of aid and the narrow location of adult education in it be something that other popular educators and NGOs working in the field of adult education begin to appreciate.” (11)
On the other hand, meanwhile, there was and still is within the ICAE and among its membership a serious debate over the role of adult education in combating poverty. This became most visible from the beginning of the eighties, when there was an attempt to understand better the different ways of tackling poverty, comparing national strategies with via grassroots approaches, by combining case studies with analysis and strategic recommendations.

In 1980 ICAE, with support and contributions from the World Bank, convened a working session in Washington DC, the Proceedings of which appeared as a special issue of *Convergence*. This took up issues raised by the Independent Commission on International Development chaired by Willy Brandt in *North-South: a Programme for Survival*, and set up an ICAE Commission of Inquiry into Adult Education and Poverty that worked during the eighties. (12)

Two main volumes were produced. These drew together empirical studies of approaches to poverty reduction in different parts of the South. They contrasted the localised but significant changes that can be effected especially by more radical civil society-driven approaches on broadly Freirean lines, but where ‘scaleability’ seems to be an intransigent problem, with national and other large-scale top-down government-led or supported programmes. These have wide reach but in the main only shallower impact. The puzzle of how to combine the best of these two approaches remains a central challenge for CONFINTEA VI, two decades after this work was completed.

2004

The abiding tragedy of poverty was addressed again in the Gabarone conference in 2004, when the University of Botswana hosted a meeting jointly financed by the World Bank and *dvv international*, involving ICAE as well as UIL, and a broad range of participants. The *Gabarone Statement and Recommendations for Action* claimed that

“Adult education at all levels is an essential ingredient both to compensate for earlier educational inadequacies and to empower people with the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills for sustainable participation in a constantly changing world. We see poverty as a complex phenomenon, with adult education helping to develop a culture of learning and thus breaking the endemic cycle of poverty in poor communities. Government investment in adult education reduces the costs of poor health, low skills, and lack of participation in society and the economy. … We believe that donor policies for lifelong learning must include all levels of education for the development of knowledge, values and skills for sustainable livelihoods and participation in all levels of society. Successful adult education, however, requires grassroots, bottom-up development in dialogue with the poor themselves. Policies, programmes and legislation should reflect this and recognize that poverty cannot be resolved without the active participation of those living in poverty.”
And in the Recommendations for Action:

- “Lobby donors such as the World Bank to adopt a formal policy on adult education after entering into dialogue with the adult education community.
- Lobby for financial support for all levels of adult education in recognition that basic, literacy education is not enough for poverty reduction and that people living in poverty also need continuous training and access to relevant technologies.
- Stimulate multi-sectoral collaborations in dialogue with government, non-governmental organisations, the private sectors, donors, researchers, practitioners, and communities of poor people…” (13)

Towards CONFINTEA VI and the new imperative for 2009

Where however, in the more recent frenzied debate over the global fiscal and economic crisis that broke out in 2008, and the actions taken to bail out banks and other corporations and avert a new Great Depression – above all in and for the developed world – has there been recognition of the need for clear-cut policies to reduce poverty, let alone the allocation of significant resources for implementation? Where too is the recognition around G20 and suchlike tables of the indispensable role that youth and adult education and learning could play?

Certainly the predicament of the South is now more often on the agenda, but priority flowing from significant political will and commitment is still not there. Nor has the adult education community made its case persuasively enough heard in the places where vital decisions are taken.

There can no longer be any doubt that adult education within lifelong learning is a key factor for economic and social development. In addition in should be emphatically claimed as a universal human right. New policies for adult education must result in coherent laws and forms of legislation, which clearly spell out ways and means for financing adult education, involving public, private and third sector social partners as well as the individual. It remains apparent from a wealth of comparative studies that changes in most countries are too slow, too narrow and unambitious. They are not sufficiently far-reaching, and they continue to suffer from inadequate investment in human resources. There is an urgent need to reverse this trend.

UNESCO, CONFINTEA and beyond

The Delors Report to UNESCO in 1996 claimed ‘learning throughout life’ as the key to a better future. (14) Educationists should do all that is possible to create opportunities to fulfil individuals’ learning needs and related capacities. Learning must be associated with all dimensions of life, long, wide and deep. It happens and should be supported at and in all times, levels, and forms, whether formal, nonformal or informal. To repeat again: there are strong arguments for a four-pillar approach to the concept and system of lifelong learning; and there should be no doubt that schools, vocational training, universities and adult education are of equal importance for the individual and for society.
Five steps towards Belem

For adult educators, the acronym CONFINTEA signifies a milestone for orientation and learning internationally, and in building a world-wide community, discourse and even movement. It stands for the International Conferences on Adult Education that are organised and convened by UNESCO every twelve or so years. The first took place in 1949 in Helsingør (Denmark), the second in 1960 in Montreal (Canada), the third in 1972 in Tokyo (Japan), the fourth in 1985 in Paris (France), and the fifth in 1997 in Hamburg (Germany). Each conference constituted a unique landmark.

Thus the Helsingør conference was held in the spirit of renewal and rebuilding in the wake of the Second World War. The Montreal conference provided a platform for the voices of ‘developing countries’ after, and those still in the process of, decolonisation. The Montreal statement stated a claim that is still being made for today:

“We believe that adult education has become of such importance for man’s [sic] survival and happiness that a new attitude towards it is needed. Nothing less will suffice than that people everywhere should come to accept adult education as a normal, and that governments should treat it as a necessary, part of the educational provision of every country.” (15)

By 1972, the 3rd World Conference in Tokyo was important for the development of adult education as a profession. It looked at questions of policy, structures, methods, and necessary materials. There followed the Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education issued by the UNESCO General Conference in Nairobi in 1976, which remain relevant today.

It is being suggested however that the time has come for its revision, and for a new set of guiding principles. This is likely to be taken up in CONFINTEA VI, at least as part of a recommended follow-up agenda, since it is explicitly proposed as the final point in the draft conference Belem Framework for Action.

The 4th World Conference took place during the late but difficult period of the protracted ‘Cold War’ stand-off. On the governmental side it was severely hampered by being treated as a power bloc political arena. Yet, perhaps in part as a result, it also saw a significant expression of energy and purpose by non-governmental or civil society representatives, prominent among them ICAE, in focusing the right to learn.

CONFINTEA V in Hamburg in 1997, with its Agenda for the Future, enjoyed strong informal third-sector leadership and influence. It was conspicuous in claiming for adult education, alongside formal education, a prominent role in shaping the emergent globalised world of the coming new century. It was the first CONFINTEA that fully recognised the decisive contribution of civil society to the learning of adults, seen as part of a continuing process of lifelong learning.
Preparing for CONFINTEA VI

We are now preparing for and close to CONFINTEA VI, which will take place at the end of 2009 in Belem, Brazil. A Consultative Group was established at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), and preparatory conferences at regional level have been held on a monthly basis, beginning with Mexico and followed by others in Seoul, Nairobi, Budapest and Tunis.

As a requirement for CONFINTEA, national reports had to be provided; they are now posted on the website and are a rich source of information. A major effort of the Consultative Group was the Global Report on Adult Education and Learning (GRALE), seen as a key background document for CONFINTEA VI. (16)

Looking to the immediate situation in which we find ourselves in June 2009, following the regional conferences and reports, and a draft Belem Framework for Action ready to launch when CONFINTEA VI was deferred, we find a large measure of agreement across the major world regions which convened, reviewed and reported, but also some important differences of emphasis, reflecting the diversity of regional (as well as more local) realities and perceptions of priority. The short time between the first meeting, in Mexico in September 2008, and the fifth, of the Arab States in Tunisia in January this year, also played a part in differences of perception.

Reading all the reports along with the draft Belem Framework one is reminded time and again of the old question of perception: ‘is the glass half full or half empty?’ It is of course both. We need to understand this in steering a path between complacency at what has been achieved since 1997, and the enormity of the tasks that remain to be addressed. It is interesting also that the European report, coming one from last, in December, refers to ‘the financial crisis across the region and the wider world’. So does the Arab States report coming a month later. The Arab report stresses the relatively high spend on education in that region. The crisis is not mentioned in the three earlier reports, coming from regions with the largest obvious problems of development, from HIV AIDS and general extreme poverty to uneven but places very high persisting level of illiteracy – by country, gender or minority community.

While recognising the diverse priorities and circumstances of different regions, we should ask how far pre-Belem work stretching back at least two years has been able to assimilate and adapt to what might be a quite different situation now facing all countries. It would be a pity if CONFINTEA VI also failed to absorb this and conducted its dialogues very much on ‘business as usual’ lines.

Common themes include the need for a much more integrated approach between government departments and development policies, and also far better connection and sharing of responsibility and effort between the State or public sector and the private and especially the NGO, civil society, community-based or third sector. There is also a strongly shared call for the effective setting of targets, and above all for effective data collection and monitoring against these. In several cases this is linked to a sense that governments may be good at creating policies and even legislation (noting the formal progress in Europe in the EU and Lisbon Agenda context) but very poor at exercising sustained political will to implement them.
The moderation in ambition is reflected in a repeated call for governments to reach or approach the targets set in Hamburg twelve years ago for levels of government investment in education overall and adult education within this. In all the documentation there is little mention of a global quantum of funds such as CONFINTEA VI might wish to assert in light of the ‘telephone directory’ levels of bail-out funding employed to head off more serious financial crisis in the countries of the North. The EFA Global Monitoring Report for 2009 suggests US$ 11 billion a year to implement fully three Dakar goals, including literacy. The Asian region report calls on development partners to fill the EFA funding gap with “at least US$ 2.5 billion” to reach the EFA 2015 literacy target.

For the Latin American and Caribbean region the shift from literacy to lifelong learning is seen as the greatest challenge. Other major themes are the need for structural changes and convergence of policies, along with responsiveness to the diversity of ethnicities and cultures. This like some other reports also identifies and challenges the serious narrowing of the adult education agenda to little more than vocational training.

The African report stresses even more strongly the need for an African perspective rooted in that continent’s philosophies and cultures. Both these reports identify “artificially inducted crises to do with depleted natural resources and food shortages”, rather than the generalised fiscal/economic crisis as seen in the North. The African report is the only one to make explicit reference to what might be argued to be the most significant cause for optimism in the ‘half-full or half empty’ see-saw: ‘the historic political change’ that has taken place with the election of Obama in the world’s most powerful country.

The generally apolitical, more optimistic and perhaps bland summations that come together at world level in the pre-CONFINTA documentation sit uneasily with some points in these regional reports – such as the African comment on paucity or absence of use of mother tongues which is often neglected. On the other hand, the draft Framework paper is clear and firm on many issues that we have raised here, including financing, inclusion, and the need for effective data collection and monitoring. Its concluding ‘Statement of Evidence’ is also commendably explicit about the real failings, and the large agenda still before us.

**Learning from and monitoring EFA**

There is no doubt that EFA and the MDGs have provided a framework, a target, and an accountability structure that are helping many countries to identify where to focus their attention.

Those who were in Dakar in 2000 for the World Education Forum, where the policy of *Education for All* was framed, will remember how difficult it was to have non-formal youth and adult education, learning, and training included as priority areas, especially since they are not part of the MDGs. The *EFA Global Monitoring Reports* that have appeared since 2002 have provided a wealth of information, and a strong foundation for the critical debate that has unfolded around the reports *Is the world on*
track (2002), and EFA by 2015. Will we make it? (2008). 2006 saw the Global Monitoring Report Literacy for Life, which looked at achievements in the promotion of youth and adult literacy. All these reports and commissioned papers can be found on the web pages of UNESCO. (17)

In preparation for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2008, some 25 papers were commissioned on non-formal education (NFE) in a variety of countries. Four leading questions were posed for each country:

- How is NFE conceptualised?
- What are the legal foundations for NFE policies?
- How are NFE programmes governed and financed?
- How is NFE supported and managed?

It is striking and important how much more difficult it is to monitor goals three and four than the first two goals which focus on early childhood care and compulsory primary education. Having robust data and constructing reliable indicators proves elusive.

Looking at the four questions above, however, we can see clearly the overlap in the concerns of CONFINTEA and EFA, especially over the issues of policy, legislation, and financing for adult education which ICAE considers particularly important. The main question is what can we learn for CONFINTEA VI from the Global Monitoring Report case studies? This secondary analysis of the EFA studies which were commissioned on non-formal education has been helpful in sharpening insights into several important points.

Let us take one central one. There are several interesting policies, theories, and practices, with many new initiatives, projects, and programmes. But all in all they support the assumption that without strong and permanent structures, including policy and legislation, and without coordination and support, non-formal education for children, youth and adults is not an adequate solution, either for CONFINTEA or for EFA, to settle for and recommend. If non-formal education remains under-resourced and insufficiently governed it will not work, despite all the creativity, motivation, and energy of the people involved.

It can be stated in simple terms that NFE

- is not a cheaper or easier solution, nor should it be treated as second class
- cannot simply compensate for schooling but with even less resources
- needs structures based on policy, legislation, and finances, much as do schools and universities.

To echo an earlier crucial point, it is a common error and a false dichotomy for governments to provide support just for schooling, but leave international donors to take care of NFE projects from left-over sector funds or 'basket' funding. Smaller schemes and pilot projects should win recognition and seek sustainability at an early stage. Otherwise, when funding dries up, project activities die out.
In most of the country studies there is an element of local structure, often under the name of *community learning centres*. But again, such structures cannot reliably function and be sustained without support. In most countries it remains an unanswered question what kind of service providers are needed at provincial or regional level to foster training, research, and development. (18)

**The last words on EFA**

The most recent EFA Global Monitoring Report focuses on overcoming inequality and suggests the importance of governance. The sections on EFA Goals 3 and 4 do not make cheerful reading for adult education, which continues to be largely neglected within the EFA framework. It refers to the immense backlog of unmet need, and the problems of definition and lack of data which stymie the systematic monitoring which every pre-Belem regional report calls for. The absence of quantitative targets out of Dakar is seen as a persisting contributory problem which should surely now gain priority. The report suggests that lack of clarity about the purposes of lifelong learning is a problem, as well as obvious weakness of political commitment.

Specifically apropos literacy, aggregated progress masks major disparities within countries, it is also pointed out that official literacy figures generally understate the scale of the problem and the need across rich and poor countries alike, with similarly damaging results for individuals and impoverished communities in each case.

On the broader canvas, Chapter Four, deals with increasing aid and improving governance. It points out the failure, still, to honour pledges made by rich countries at Dakar in 2000, likewise to honour promises made in 2005. It also suggests some problems and undesirable consequences arising from changes in aid arrangements (stronger country ownership, sector-wide approaches, and ‘harmonisation’), noting unevenness and vulnerabilities among current donors, and the serious shortfalls already evident, even before the new global crisis which became evident only after this volume was published in 2008.

Moreover the FTI (Fast Track Initiative) launched in 2002 is proving disappointing so far to include a literacy component for youth and adults, and is threatened by serious and early financial shortfall. Allowing that in the end the will and capability of government is more crucial than the quantum of aid, and that educational progress (for the young or adults) is contingent on progress in other sectors, the report notes the absence of ‘a strong and consistent voice’ to keep EFA central to the aid agenda.

**Objectives, activities and outputs of the conference**

As to what this Bonn Conference might achieve, let us look for generating and exchanging information, both at the time during those few days in June, and on an ongoing basis, reinforcing and adding to existing networks between adult educators, development aid personnel, local workers, and others involved in the field.
We will prepare and quickly make available a report of the conference proceedings that can help the global adult education community to prepare further for and extract maximum benefit from the large and costly CONFINTEA VI gathering. Let us treat the deferral at Belem from May to December as the opportunity to make greater impact, really clarifying and preparing to lobby for what is really now needed adequately to finance and support adult education.

Let us expand our vision of what might be possible - in a spirit of yes we can. This may help us to place adult education and learning, in its full and non-emasculated sense, centre-stage in more equitable sustainable and balanced social development, extending beyond economic recovery preoccupied with the wellbeing of the nations of the North to embrace the whole world.

References

(1) See H. Hinzen, B. Schmidt-Behlau (eds.): The Right to Education in the Context of Migration and Integration. IPE – International Perspectives in Adult Education 59. Bonn: dvv international 2008


(3) Quoted from: UNESCO: The Global Economic and Financial Crisis and its effects on Education. Executive Board, Hundred and Eighty-first Session, item 57 of the Provisional Agenda, 181 EX/57. Paris, 6 April 2009

(4) Quoted from: Acting Together. Oslo Declaration. Eighth Meeting of the High Level Group on Education for All. 16-18 December 2008, Oslo, Norway


(9) Circulated by ICAE in preparation of the FISC conference to be organised back-to-back with CONFINTEA VI in Belem.


(15) UNESCO: *Declaration of the Montreal Conference on Adult Education*. Quoted from *AED* 43, p 343-344


(17) See [www.efareport.unesco.org](http://www.efareport.unesco.org)