

CONFINTEA V1, BELEM, BRAZIL – Dec 4th 2009 FINAL REACTIONS FROM THE CIVIL SOCIETY CAUCUS

In the build up to this major UN Conference on Adult Education held in Brazil from 1st-4th December, civil society organisations developed a strong united position reflecting the views of over 500 people from 80 countries. Together we laid out a consensus position on how the conference could move from rhetoric to coherent action. We won space and recognition for civil society within the conference. Indeed, our positions for strengthening action on the right to education for all adults and young people were fully endorsed by the heads of 22 national government delegations from all regions, won significant support from another 14 governments and were debated throughout the conference

As a result of civil society action and support from many governments there were some significant gains. There was an acknowledgement of the urgent need for action on adult literacy and there was a welcome recognition that we need to move beyond past simplistic understandings of literacy, to recognise a continuum of learning. There was a commitment to produce fully costed and well-targeted plans backed up by legislation – and with active participation from civil society, educators and learners themselves. There was strong language recognising different forms of discrimination that undermine access to education. The commitment to monitor progress on adult education was significantly reinforced with clear timelines. There was a commitment to developing educational responses to the increasing challenges of migration. Perhaps most importantly there was a commitment to ensure that the major global financing mechanism for education for all (called the Education Fast Track Initiative) should explicitly support adult literacy.

However the world faces a series of major crises (food, fuel, finance, climate, conflict and war) and for adult education to empower people, especially women, to respond to these we need to go much further. For example, taking place on the eve of the UN Copenhagen Climate Conference, this UN conference (held in the Amazon region of Brazil) made it clear that human resource development is fundamental to addressing the natural resource crises that face planet earth. This reinforces the urgency of addressing the chronic under-funding of adult education.

Building on the progress made by CONFINTEA V1 there are some important issues that need to be pursued further in order to provide a strong framework for achieving real progress on adult education:

- There is an urgent need for governments to commit to a 6% target as an equitable share of the domestic education budget to be earmarked for the education of adults and young people.
- Northern governments need also to commit 6% of their education aid budgets for the education of adults and young people.
- There needs to be a stronger recognition of the role of adult education in ensuring gender justice and a clear recognition of gender as an integral and cross-cutting issue.
- Action is also needed to address the macro-economic policies which presently block countries from investing adequately in education, particularly in the context of the financial crisis, which has discredited past prescriptions from the IMF.
- In the coming years there needs to be greater recognition of the enormous scale of the violation of the fundamental right to education of adults and young people. We need to move from recognising that basic adult education is a *justiciable* human right, to a point where governments pass legislation to make *all* adult education legally enforceable.

Civil society has a crucial role to play in rigorous monitoring and in being a partner of government in developing adult learning policy and practice. Whilst recognising the enormous efforts made by UNESCO in CONFINTEA V1 it is clear that future conferences must ensure that processes for handling amendments and finalising documents need to be significantly improved and made more transparent.

We commit ourselves to continuing the struggle to secure coherent action on the right to education for adults and young people. We now return to our work in each community and country with renewed passion to make this fundamental right a reality.