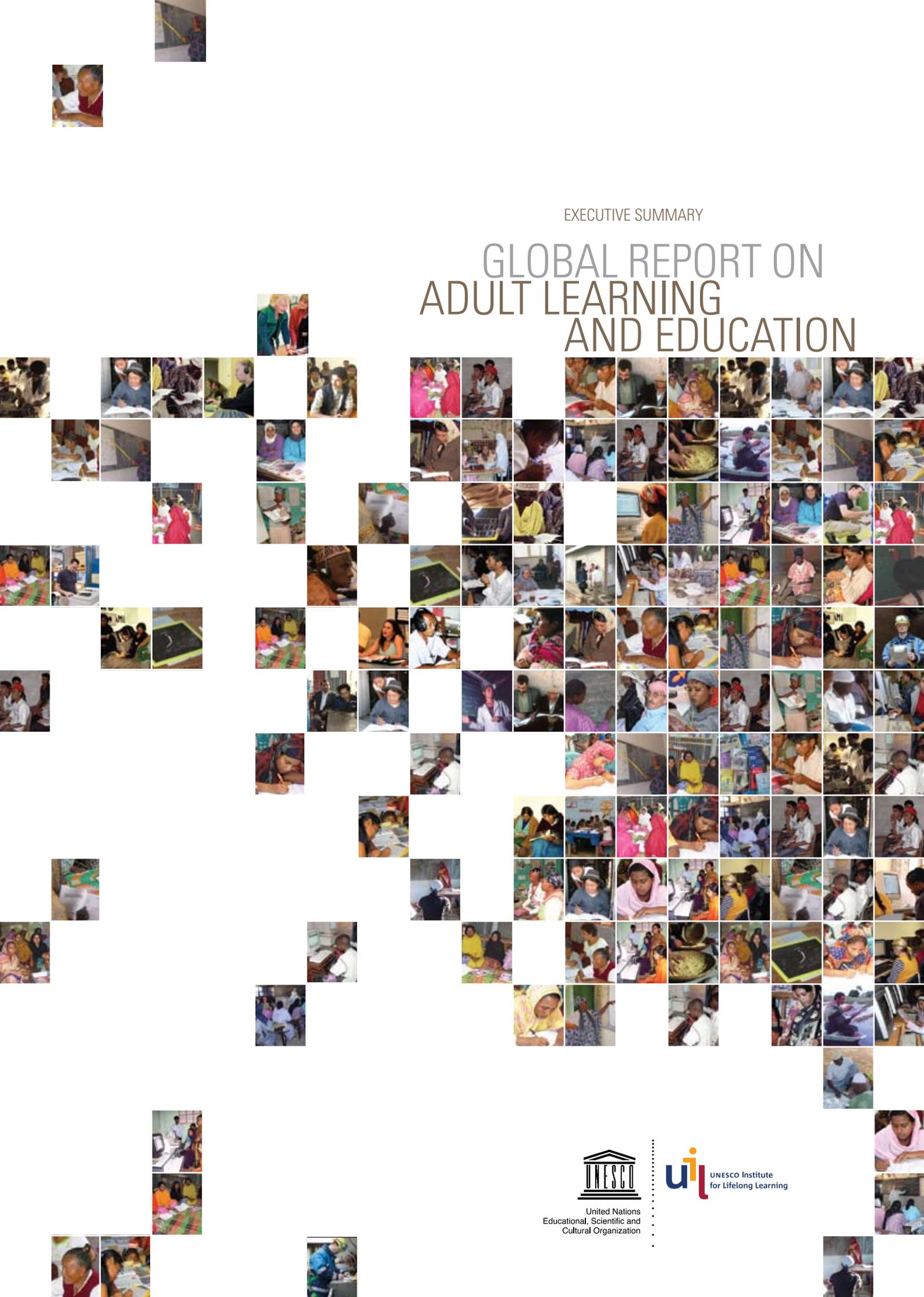


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GLOBAL REPORT ON ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



UNESCO Institute
for Lifelong Learning

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This first-ever *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* is based on 154 National Reports submitted by UNESCO Member States on the state of adult learning and education, five Regional Synthesis Reports and secondary literature. Its purpose is to provide an overview of the trends in adult learning and education as well as identify key challenges. It is intended to be used as a reference document and an advocacy tool, as well as input to CONFINTEA VI.

The Report is organised into six chapters which address key issues. Chapter 1 examines how adult education is considered in the international educational and development policy agenda. It indicates the need to situate adult education within a lifelong learning perspective and adopt a capability approach. Chapter 2 presents developments in policy and governance while Chapter 3 describes the range of provision of adult education and offers a typology for understanding the variety of provision in the sector. Chapter 4 reviews patterns of participation and access to adult education while Chapter 5 deals with quality in adult education. Chapter 6 appraises the current state of the financing of adult education. A concluding section provides an overview of trends and challenges.

Chapter 1 The case for adult learning and education

1.1 Adult education in the global education and development policy agenda

There has been uneven progress towards achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals, mainly in relation to universal primary education (UPE) and the reduction of gender disparities. Unsatisfactory progress is notable in the EFA Goals directly related to adult education – namely, ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are equitably met and reducing adult illiteracy rates by 50 per cent by 2015. Despite worldwide agreement on the EFA agenda, the slow and uneven progress shows that certain goals have been accorded more importance and priority than others when, in fact, all goals are inter-connected and need to be addressed concurrently. The continued dominance of UPE, whether measured by enrolment ratios in the EFA agenda or completion rates in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), underscores the marginalisation of the youth, adult literacy and lifelong learning objectives which are vital to overall success. This marginalisation is also shown by the absence of adult education as an MDG strategy, especially as achieving the goals requires adults to learn new skills, new information and new values. The simple truth is that improvements in provision, participation and quality in adult education can accelerate progress towards all eight Millennium Development Goals.

1.2 Adult education within a perspective of lifelong learning

A brief history of adult education and related frameworks and concepts is given. Two perspectives are compared: adult education as a human right and as

a means for transforming individuals, communities and societies; and adult education as a means for economic development. Although the latter is more dominant currently, both the empowering and the instrumental rationales are needed in our societies. A landscape of adult education and lifelong learning exists, with mixed principles, policies and practices. Repositioning adult education within lifelong learning requires a shared philosophy of the purposes and benefits of adult learning. Such a philosophy is expounded in Amartya Sen's capability approach, which considers the expansion of human capabilities, rather than merely economic development, as the overarching objective of development policy. This approach looks beyond the economic dimension, and the mere pursuit of happiness, to encompass concepts of affiliation such as the capability to interact socially and participate politically.

1.3 The need for a strengthened adult education

CONFINTEA V reaffirmed the right of adults to basic education and skills and the importance of partnerships between the state, civil society and the private sector in developing and sustaining adult learning and education. However, country reports since 1997 show that many education and social policies have not prioritised adult learning and education as had been anticipated following the Hamburg Declaration. Some of these issues were flagged in the CONFINTEA V Mid-Term Review (UNESCO, 2003). A lack of shared understanding of adult learning has led to a divided policy discourse. The North concentrates on operationalising the discourse of lifelong learning; the South focuses on basic education. Adult education's contribution to development remains unrecognised and unacknowledged.

Chapter 2 The policy environment and governance framework of adult education

2.1 Policy development in adult education

Of the 154 countries submitting National Reports in preparation for CONFINTEA VI, 126 (82%) declared that adult education is covered directly or indirectly by some kind of government policy. There are regional differences: such policies exist in 92% of countries in the European region and 68% of countries in the Arab region. However, interpretations of the term 'policy' vary widely, ranging from the national Constitution, through executive fiats and legislative enactments to medium-term development plans and decennial education plans. Only 56 countries (36%) said they had introduced specific adult education policy since 1997. Half of these countries (27) are from the European region and one third (19) from sub-Saharan Africa. The high rate for the European region is to be expected given that since 2000, the Lisbon Strategy considers lifelong learning as the key measure in making Europe the most competitive region in the world. In eight of the African countries reporting a specific policy on adult education, closer inspection reveals that these policies actually focus on improving literacy. A global analysis points to five trends in policy objectives:

- framework-setting, usually within a lifelong learning perspective;
- promotion of literacy and non-formal education;
- regulation of vocational or adult education;
- creation of specialised agencies; and
- provision for the implementation of specific programmes.

Adult education policies are shaped by many related factors – national socio-economic contexts as well as external factors (financial crisis or the influence of regional and international organisations).

2.2 Coordinating and regulating adult education: some governance issues

The participation of all stakeholders in educational governance is a key issue. Three patterns of adult education governance structures emerge:

- departments within education ministries (or their equivalent);
- relatively independent authorities, which may or may not be under the direct formal control of a ministry; and
- delegation of responsibility to local agencies.

Most National Reports indicate that adult education governance is decentralised. The devolution of responsibility for adult education to organisations at an arm's length from government can lead to greater responsiveness to local needs and circumstances. However, this has not been accompanied automatically by systematic and intensified involvement of other stakeholders in planning, implementing and monitoring adult education policy and practice. Globally, adult education governance is still under-developed. Few countries have specific legislation that sets out aims and regulatory principles for the sector. Even fewer establish frameworks that clearly define overall responsibilities for planning, funding and provision. This leads to 'fuzzy' governance patterns, which may enable healthy diversity and create space for local innovation, but which make it difficult to pinpoint accountability and designate responsibility. This reduces the sector's visibility within educational policy and in society at large.

2.3 Conclusion

The key challenge is to mainstream adult education policy within an integrated lifelong learning policy framework which specifies the purposes and scope of adult education. This must encompass the full continuum from basic literacy to vocational training, to human resource development and continuing professional development. Public policy needs to gear itself to establishing legal, funding and governance structures that can better link formal, non-formal and informal adult learning into cohesive systems. It implies a type of governance that rises above established educational policy-making by demanding more integrated, more accessible, more relevant and more accountable structures and processes.

Chapter 3 The provision of adult education

3.1 The broad range of adult education

Given the broad array of purposes of adult education, it is logical that there is a wide variety of adult education provision. Globally, basic education (mainly adult literacy programmes) remains the dominant form of adult education, with 127 countries (82%) declaring this as one of their programmes. Vocational and work-related education is provided in 117 countries (76%). Life-skills and knowledge generation activities are also significant in many countries (see Table 3.1). There are regional differences. Basic education is the principal form in sub-Saharan Africa (93%), the Arab states (84%) and much of Latin America and the Caribbean (96%) – hardly surprising, given that this is where the majority of the 774 million without basic reading and writing skills live. Although finding and staying in employment are key preoccupations globally, vocational and work-related educational activities tend to dominate in Asia (83%) and Europe (89%). Skills formation for work is indeed a prerequisite with today's fast-changing demands for different competences.

Who provides adult education programmes also varies by region. While government remains the primary provider in much of the world, other stakeholders are associated with particular forms of adult education in different regions. By and large, basic skills and literacy programmes for adults are provided through the public sector and the efforts of NGOs. The private sector is more likely to be involved in continuing vocational education and training (CVET) and workplace learning than in other forms of provision.

3.1 An international typology for understanding adult education

Pointing to broad tendencies rather than definite positions of countries, an international typology is presented, which suggests that profiles of adult education provision tend to change in relation to social and economic development. As countries develop, adult education provision expands to cover a greater range

of content, purposes and programmes. In this cumulative process, existing adult education frameworks are not discarded, but supplemented by new ones. In general, private sector provision of adult education has expanded in the past decade, both absolutely (to respond to employer and company needs) and relatively in light of public spending restrictions. The privatisation or commercialisation of certain types of programmes results in a dramatically-changed provision profile in adult education. The impetus for these trends is a widespread belief that privately-funded provision is more flexible to market demand, and that publicly-financed provision fails to match the workplace requirement for competencies. At the same time, civil society involvement is growing.

3.3 Conclusion

Provision in most countries increasingly takes on the following characteristics:

- public provision is restricted to a minimum purpose at the lowest level;
- any provision beyond 'minimum' public supply is given over to the private sector, commercial providers or NGOs whose provision is subject to supply and demand;
- provision thus becomes short-term, dispensable and contingent on the availability of resources; and
- a weakened rationale for an elaborate and stable governance structure for the provision of adult learning and education.

As adult education provision becomes increasingly diversified and decentralised, there is even greater need for co-ordination to secure resourcing, policy impact and public support.

Chapter 4 Participation and equity in adult education

4.1 Low overall rates of participation

There are limitations in comparing adult education participation rates as data in National Reports range from enrolment figures to programme participation rates. It is only for high-income countries, and a select set of developing nations, that fairly robust and comparable data have been available since the mid-1990s. Overall, while there is some improvement in adult education participation rates since CONFINTEA V, in most countries they remain unacceptably low. The proportion of adults who have not completed primary schooling or its equivalent shows a large unmet demand for adult basic education. In Europe and North America, adult education surveys are able to track patterns of participation. The first Europe-wide adult education survey, conducted 2005-2006 and covering 29 countries, revealed an average participation rate of 35.7%, with huge variations, Sweden's rate being 73.4%. In general, adult education participation rates are positively correlated with a country's level of economic development as measured by per capita GDP: on average, the more prosperous the country, the higher the participation rate.

4.2 Inequity in participation

Within countries, levels of participation vary according to socio-economic, demographic and regional factors, revealing structural deficiencies in access to adult education. There is inequity within an overall low participation. Gender, geographical location, age and socio-economic status all play a part.

4.3 Multiple and structural causes for low and inequitable access to adult learning and education

Three kinds of barriers are identified: institutional, situational and dispositional. Examples of measures to increase participation and address inequity are given, including targeted policies, developing programmes focusing on specific groups, and establishing learning communities.

4.4 Conclusion

The striking pattern which emerges from the National Reports concerns the intransigence of many participation and equity issues in adult education. In essence, those who have least education continue to get least. This is the “wicked issue” that adult education policy must attack. It is clear that generalised policy will not redress the balance, although a commitment to universal access must be maintained. Substantial resources, however, must be concentrated on those who have least

Chapter 5 Quality in adult education

5.1 Relevance as a quality indicator

This chapter focuses on two quality dimensions in adult education: relevance and effectiveness. The most important is the relevance of provision to learners. Relevance is more likely to be achieved if adult education policies and their programmes are fully integrated with other education sectors – from early childhood education to higher education and across the continuum of formal, non-formal and informal education. Engendering and sustaining enthusiasm to learn are a central challenge in adult education programmes. Motivation is contingent on the provision of relevant learning content that addresses adult learners’ contexts and hopes. Much adult education relates to the dominant culture. Many now recognise the importance of culture-specific responses in meeting adult aspirations and generating lifelong learning strategies. Learning opportunities – especially in adult literacy and basic skills programmes – are best when in the language which learners feel most comfortable to express themselves and convey information and ideas

5.2 Effectiveness as a quality indicator

Effectiveness in adult education generally expresses means-end relationships in terms of educational outcomes for learners, and the time needed to achieve programme aims. Infrastructural conditions are important. When buildings, teaching rooms and learning materials are inadequate, dilapidated and out-of-date, those working and learning in such

conditions are less likely to feel that they and their efforts are of value. Completion rates and achievement levels are hard indicators of effectiveness, but there is much room for improvement in the design and implementation of assessment and accreditation procedures and outcomes. Meanwhile, national qualifications provide broader forms of recognising achievement and can open up routes to further qualification pathways.

5.3 Assuring quality

Improving quality in adult education entails effective monitoring and quality assurance, preferably undertaken by representative, non-bureaucratic and autonomous adult education councils. Implementing quality assurance is not a straightforward process, as quality itself is not absolute but relative. Adult learning programmes and activities can either be compared either with each other (normative evaluation) or against an external set of objectives and standards (criterion evaluation).

5.4 Adult education personnel as the key to ensuring quality

As in other education sectors, teachers, facilitators and trainers constitute the most important quality input factor in adult education. However, in too many cases, adult educators are inappropriately trained, hold minimal qualifications, are under-paid and work in educationally unfavourable conditions. Fifty National Reports cite the quality of adult education personnel as a key challenge. There is huge variation in entry qualifications and terms of employment for adult education personnel. Some countries require postgraduate qualification and several years’ experience. In many countries, however, secondary education or even less is sufficient.

5.5 Conclusion

In good-quality adult education, pedagogies take their cue from what learners already know and value. Relationships between teachers and learners are central. Teachers and trainers need to understand the contexts in which learners live and how they make sense of their lives. Learner-centeredness, such as involving learners fully in the shaping of teaching and learning

processes, is a vital quality determinant for adult educators. Funders, policy-makers and governments are usually more pre-occupied with concrete outcomes of learning, often expressed through accreditation and qualifications. These two viewpoints are not necessarily in conflict – but inevitably they are sometimes in tension.

Part of a solution is to advocate for participatory and locally-adapted programmes and activities in a transparent and professionalised environment and that provide demonstrable outcomes for providers and participants alike. Investment in human resources – that is, in the quantitative and qualitative supply of teaching personnel with adequate contractual, working and professional development conditions – is probably the most salient indicator of quality in adult education. It should be the focal point of quality in educational policies.

Chapter 6 The financing of adult education

6.1 The current state of adult education financing: an overview of available data

Because of understandings of adult education and the range of public and private stakeholders involved, reliable and comparable data on adult education financing are difficult to obtain. Out of 154 National Reports, only 57 countries (37%) give information on adult education budget allocations. Some refer to adult education expenditures as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP); others to the share of the state budget; and still others calculate the share of the education budget devoted to adult education. In addition, different components of adult education (literacy, non-formal education, vocational education or post-compulsory education) are included. The scant figures in the National Reports preclude a comprehensive evaluation of which countries have reached the benchmark (agreed at CONFINTEA V) to devote 6% of GDP to education and, if so, whether an “equitable” share is allocated to adult education. Only a few developing countries come close to achieving recommended targets for the financing of adult education programmes. An estimated global shortfall of US\$72 billion must be found if investment targets in adult education are to be met. Shortfalls exist for countries at all income levels. With data caveats in mind, the general assessment is clear: in the vast majority of countries current resources remain wholly inadequate for supporting a credible adult education policy. In 44% of National Reports explicitly acknowledged the need to increase finances for adult education.

6.2 Under-investment in adult education

Globally there is a noticeable tendency to under-invest in adult education. Data limitations and poor information systems on adult education costs and benefits have reduced the capability for informed policy-making and have led to under-investment. There are market-related reasons why individual learners and employers may under-invest in adult education. Governments may under-invest because they are unable to measure fully the wider benefits to society. There is evidence that

overall educational returns to investment are substantial (at least as high as the return on investment in physical infrastructure), and that more equitable participation in education improves overall economic development. Nonetheless, there are many unresolved debates about the nature and extent of these benefits. These issues are especially challenging given the difficulties of measuring the monetary benefits and the non-monetary benefits of adult learning and education. The information available for decision-making on allocation, distribution and use of resources in the education sector is fraught with imperfections. For many governments, this lack of information means that they are unable to establish priorities, allocate adequate resources, and justify investments in adult education. Similarly, lack of hard data prevents firms and individuals from assessing costs and benefits, which can lead to reduced incentives and under-investment.

6.3 Stakeholder contributions: experiences and problems in determining who should pay

Who pays depends on whether the value to be gained is personal, social or economic and on who stands to benefit from this added value. Unfortunately, such general principles provide only a weak basis for sharing the cost of adult education provision among partners. Often the benefits of each programme are not easily identifiable. Even if they were, it is difficult to identify an appropriate or fair share for each partner. What monetary value should be placed on a well-educated, skilled and participatory citizenry, or on the value of achieving equitable access to adult education for social cohesion?

The National Reports indicate that sources of funding for adult education are multiple and diverse. Of the 108 countries that provided funding information, only 26 (24%) mentioned a single source of funding. While governments still remain the main funding source, the private sector, civil society, international donor agencies and individuals also contribute substantially. The National Reports also describe a relationship between funding sources and programme type.

6.4 moving forward in mobilising resources

The following measures are identified and described as ways of mobilising resources:

- providing the necessary information base;
- raising the value of adult education;
- focusing greater attention on achieving equity;
- mobilising resources from partners: the private sector and civil society; and
- raising the level of international assistance.

6.5 Conclusion

Progress in the future requires better knowledge of what is happening on the ground through better data provision, more and better studies of cost-benefits in both economic and social terms, better partnerships and clearer views on what partners are best able to contribute. These can help to make the financial case for effective adult education provision.

