

Seventh International Conference on Adult Education

15 to 17 June 2022

Marrakech, Morocco

Report by the General Rapporteur of CONFINTEA VII

Cecilia Palm, Secretary-general of Folkuniversitetet, Sweden

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Good afternoon, delegates and all conference participants.

I am honoured, as the General Rapporteur, to present my Oral Report of CONFINTEA VII - the seventh International Conference on Adult Education - held in Marrakech, Morocco from 15th to 17th June 2022 under the High Patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI.

Representatives from 142 Member States and Associate Member States, including 49 Ministers and Vice-Ministers, and over 1000 participants deliberated on the theme: “Adult learning and education for sustainable development – a transformative agenda”. We gathered in person in Marrakech and also online.

In the Opening Ceremony, Morocco announced a new African initiative to strengthen South-South coordination and cooperation in the field of adult learning and education and lifelong learning in the form of a proposed African Institute for Lifelong Learning.

Her Excellency President Sahle-Work Zewde of Ethiopia, Chair of the International Commission on the Futures of Education, called for a new social contract for education that can repair past injustices and shape more just and sustainable futures.

These were bold statements which set the tone for COFINTEA VII. In this report I will summarize some of the trends, opportunities and challenges – as well as policy measures – that we have discussed together over the last three days of this conference. Looking back, we can identify some overarching dimensions which provide a lens for analysing our exchanges and speak to the moment in which we find ourselves.

When the conference started, we were all aware of the shared challenges we face, including widening social inequalities, digitalization, and the climate crisis. These profoundly impact youth and adult learners as well as the futures of education.

In today’s context, adult learning and education cannot only be reactive. It has to be transformed in order to transform society through the knowledges, skills and competences required for citizenship, social justice, employment and sustainability.

A new social contract for education must be built on two foundational principles, firstly education as a common good and secondly, the right to education throughout life.

Indeed, education is a common good that opens the door to other rights. For the common good, democratic and inclusive dialogue with all stakeholders is crucial. And for adult learning and education to be learner-centred, learners – including youth – must participate in shaping it, not only as beneficiaries.

We have reflected on expanding the understanding of the right to education to the right to education throughout life, based on principles of social, environmental and economic justice. In the future, adult learning and education must be more inclusive of different ways of knowing, including indigenous knowledges.

In the context of lifelong learning, every individual has a right to adult learning and education. Yet, more should be done to ensure that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged are able to exercise

their rights. Everyone has the right to pursue adult learning and education without any form of stigma or discouragement. No one should be left behind.

Regarding gender equality, there remain huge gaps even though educating women is a smart investment with intergenerational benefits. Adult learning and education must take account of gendered relationships between women and men in society. Programmes and policies must promote a holistic approach to education for women. Adult learning is instrumental to achieve gender equality and that is key for inclusive and transformative adult learning and education.

Dear delegates and participants, the detailed discussions in plenary and parallel sessions will be available in a written conference report in due course. For now, I will share a few highlights:

Citizenship education for active citizenship has been highlighted as a domain of adult learning and education we need to strengthen, particularly in response to global crises. It may involve updating our curricula to embed epistemic justice, human rights, critical thinking, democratic values, and other interpersonal values. In the presence of Ministers, the Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE 5) on the theme of citizenship education was launched. Citizenship education teaches respect for differences, critical thinking skills and awareness of our shared humanity, while reinforcing civic engagement – yet its potential has not been realised.

Literacy has been recognized as the foundation for lifelong learning as well as a lever for citizenship education deemed paramount for adult learning and education in response to global crises. We must reinvent the roles of adult educator and literacy practitioner. We discussed how we can expand notions of literacy, improve governance and policy for literacy, address funding challenges, and strengthen data and research.

The labour market is transforming, and this is likely to intensify in the years to come. We need to promote flexible lifelong learning pathways between education and work, to strengthen technical and vocational education and training, and to address youth and adults' demand for decent work. We found that there is the need to make skills systems work across all levels to serve local needs, and to provide career guidance. Our discussions also centred on improving systems of data collection and maximizing the possibilities that digital training offers, especially for vulnerable groups.

Addressing the challenges of digital environments, we looked at the roles of technology in adult learning and education and its potential, as well as concerns about equity and ways to overcome the digital divide and promote digital skills. Attention was also given to international normative instruments that frame access to knowledge, and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and connectivity for learning, especially in relation to personalised learning. Open Educational Resources (OER) can help to foster a culture of lifelong learning.

Adult learning and education for climate action was perhaps the most prescient theme tied to a major global trend. We discussed the capacity for adult learning and education to respond to crises like climate change by fostering resilience. Comprehensive measures and targeted policies aimed at reducing youth and adults' vulnerability to climate change, as well as exploring ways of fostering skills and knowledge for resilience across societies, have been shared. In terms of resilience in the face of other types of crises, adult learning and education can improve and sustain health and well-being, particularly as Member States recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have also seen how, around the world, there are some common spaces and spheres conducive to effective implementation of adult learning and education. The learning city has a unique role to play in increasing accessibility to learning opportunities and, within learning cities, community

involvement is key to sustainable lifelong learning. We heard how Community Learning Centres (CLCs) are key structures for adult learning and education, providing a hub and key entry point for quality learning for all age groups, though their success heavily relies on political will, effective governance and public funding. Libraries are in an ideal position to partner with a wide range of other ALE actors. They can and should take a more strategic leadership role to ensure lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The governance of adult learning and education, as for education and lifelong learning as a whole, faces the dual challenge of innovation to protect what is of most value and innovation to make progress. There is a need to foster interdisciplinary, intersectoral, inter-ministerial dialogue and ways of working. This is addressed in part by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning's new publication *Making Lifelong Learning a Reality: A Handbook*, which was launched at CONFINTEA VII. It provides guidelines for lifelong learning policy development and implementation in response to major sustainable development issues, including for the achievement of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4.

If I can capture the essence of our exchanges in a few words,

CONFINTEA VII has underlined the urgency of forging a new social contract for education as the future cannot wait.

Adult learning and education, as an integral component of the right to education in a lifelong learning perspective, is an essential part of this collective public endeavour.

Adult learning and education should be situated within the wider context of lifelong learning. Integrated measures are needed to create a holistic system which values learning throughout life, and ensures youth and adults are part of the process.

We need education and learning for transformative actions today. CONFINTEA VII is a turning point for expanding perceptions of education in a lifelong perspective. This is the message that we must take forward to political leaders at the highest level – adult learning and education is an investment in people, planet and prosperity. It is integral to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and beyond.

Our deliberations are directly relevant to the Transforming Education Summit, to be convened by the United Nations Secretary General in September this year, and the pre-summit to be held in Paris from 28-30 June.

Through active participation in CONFINTEA VII, as well as the adoption of the Marrakech Framework for Action here today, the international adult learning and education community has signalled its desire to make lifelong learning a reality.

Thank you.
