

ICTs in non-formal education in Asia Pacific

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BACKGROUND

Although education is a basic human right, there are millions of individuals who have not been provided an opportunity for schooling and other means to become literate. It is for this reason that non-formal education (NFE) programs for out-of-school youth and adults have been promoted in most countries of the world. In many countries, NFE forms an integral part of the official programs of basic education, often with independent organizational arrangements as well as a program budget and portfolio of activities.

Over the last two decades, rapid economic, social, and technological changes have taken place globally. Economists acknowledge that, increasingly, knowledge and technology are playing a significant role in what is termed as the ‘knowledge economy’. A linked development, sometimes called the ‘information society’, is taking place due to the advent and spread of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in varying degrees, through all the countries of the world. But while educational applications of technology would be made available to school-based programs, there is a strong possibility that due to scarce resources, the poorest and the marginalized groups will remain excluded in this kind of provisioning. Thus, there is a real danger that with the growing importance of ICTs in knowledge-based societies, groups with little or no literacy will fall further behind those who are literate, and the existing literacy gap will grow even wider. Undoubtedly, this would exacerbate the problem of the digital divide.

NFE has a critical role to play in reaching marginalized groups, and ICTs are a tool in the effective performance of this role. The present chapter critically examines the progress made

and the lessons learnt in the use of ICTs in non-formal education in the Asia Pacific region.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

NFE has always been loosely defined, and in developing countries, it has come to represent a large variety of programs spanning a wide range of age groups, target populations, and content areas. The concept of NFE needs to be unpacked to better understand the various nuances associated with the term in differing contexts and in changing times.

The original version of NFE emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Coombs (1968) and Coombs and Ahmed (1974) defined NFE as an alternative form of education for adults and children that occurred outside of the traditional classroom environment. The need for NFE arose in the context of the widespread disillusionment with formal schooling in the 1970s (Illich 1973). NFE was then seen as a panacea for the ills of education in developed and developing countries (Freire 1972), and aid agencies made substantial investments in NFE from the late 1960s to the 1980s.

The 1990s witnessed a growing ambivalence toward NFE programs as they became associated with second rate educational programs catering to the needs of poor and marginalized groups. Because accreditation frameworks were weak or non-existent in most countries, NFE students suffered a disadvantage vis-à-vis those from the formal education stream in either not being certified or in not getting absorbed in the job market.

More recently, NFE has undergone a resurgence in developing countries because of the realization that formal schooling, in its present form, has limited reach. Furthermore, it is now recognized that the educational needs of young people and adults are varied and should be addressed through suitable programs. In developed countries, NFE has assumed importance in the context of lifelong learning, which sees learning as taking place not only in schools and colleges, but throughout the lifespan, in many different locations and times and in formal, non-formal, and informal modes.

With the growing interest in NFE, it is necessary to understand what constitutes NFE and how it relates to formal and informal education, particularly in light of the diversity of formal education at present. For example, is open and distance learning part of formal or non-formal education? Are private commercial educational programs that lead to various kinds certification part of the formal system? What about e-learning? The boundaries between formal and non-formal education are becoming increasingly blurred. Even within non-formal education, there is a wide continuum of educational programs. At one end is the flexible schooling model that now exists in a number of countries, while at the other end are the highly participatory educational programs that are designed to suit the learning needs of each particular learning group.

Earlier approaches regarded formal, non-formal, and informal education as distinct categories. In contrast, Rogers (2004) proposes that they be viewed as part of a continuum, with fine gradations between them and blurred boundaries. According to Rogers, the key distinction between these three categories of education would lie in the individualization of learning. While formal education would be highly de-contextualized, standardized, and generalized, informal learning would be highly contextualized¹ and non-formal learning would be a hybrid that would include informal learning as well as formal learning.

Most countries in the Asia Pacific region have actively promoted NFE programs for out-of-school youth and adults. Many of these programs were well under way even before the Education for All (EFA) Conference held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. In fact, by then most countries in the region had already established separate organizational arrangements for promoting NFE as an effective channel of basic education. Apart from national NFE programs initiated by governments, the last decade has also witnessed the emergence of non-governmental initiatives in NFE.

The current emphasis on creating 'knowledge-based' societies has made 'learning' throughout life more important, which in turn requires an education system to have greater flexibility to enable learners to enter and leave the system at different points. Thus, accreditation and equivalency and other synergies

between the formal and the non-formal learning sectors have become essential. Moreover, a wide range of education providers, including universities, NGOs, government agencies, and the private sector, needs to be involved, particularly because learners, who have diverse learning styles, would need different kinds of skills from formal, non-formal, informal, and distance and open learning institutions.

A joint research project undertaken by member institutions of the Asia Pacific Programme of Education for All (APPEAL) Resource and Training Consortium (ARTC) to document and disseminate innovative approaches to NFE and lifelong learning in the region classifies NFE innovations in the region under three broad categories (UNESCO 2002):

- Functional literacy and adult education for poverty alleviation, as illustrated by case studies from Bangladesh and China. The Bangladesh case study with contributions from 16 NGOs gives considerable attention to linking literacy with economic activities. On the other hand, the study from China highlights that inter-sectoral coordination is critical for lifelong learning and also for linking education with poverty alleviation.
- Non-formal education for sustainable development, as in case studies from India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand. The Indian study focuses on the importance of linking NFE programs to demand from the local community and developing locally relevant curricula. In the Indonesian and Philippines case studies, it is the equivalency of the NFE program with the formal educational system that forms the basis for sustainable development, viewed as lifelong learning linked to economic improvement. The case study from Thailand demonstrates an effective approach to sustainable development through building the capacity of the rural population for community-based action in marketing.
- NFE as lifelong learning, as in case studies from Australia, Malaysia, and South Korea. The Australian case study highlights an innovative education program that enabled farmers in Queensland to assess their current situation and improve their confidence in their own ability to make strategic choices, resulting in a better quality of life, more profitable farming, and improvements in the management of land and other natural resources. The Malaysian case study focuses on the effectiveness of a lifelong learning project for capacity-building among rural youth and adults through a massive computer literacy training program. The South Korean case study describes the Credit Banking System (CBS), an open education system that recognizes diverse learning experiences not only in school but also out of school. Thus, when a student accumulates the requisite CBS-approved credits, she or he

can obtain an associate or bachelor's degree. Thus, CBS provides citizens with greater access to various educational opportunities and fosters lifelong learning.

On the whole, the case studies demonstrate that NFE is gaining ground in many countries in the Asia Pacific region. NFE programs are expanding even in countries with a high level of basic education coverage and these programs are making the formal system more flexible. In fact, in most countries, NFE programs are evolving into a potential mechanism for meeting the emerging educational needs of people more effectively than the formal system of education.

ICT IN NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN ASIA PACIFIC

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Education for All Global Monitoring Report for 2008, there are 774 million illiterate adults globally. Almost all of them live in developing countries, particularly in South and West Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Arab States where the literacy rates are about 60 percent. Women account for 64 percent of adults who cannot read and write with understanding. The problem of illiteracy among women is particularly grave in the South Asian region. Most of the illiterate women are poor, live in rural areas, are older in age, and belong to linguistic, ethnic, and religious minorities.

Achieving education for all and eradicating illiteracy by 2015 are among the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that the global community has set for itself. The education-related MDGs build on the EFA initiative agreed in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 and reaffirmed at the second EFA meeting in Dakar, Senegal in 2000. In addition, the United Nations launched the UN Literacy Decade (2003–2012), which adopts the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) global strategic framework for assisting the 35 countries in which 85 percent of the world's non-literate population lives.

Because of the established relationship between illiteracy and poverty, achieving the goals of the UN Literacy Decade is central to the realization of the MDGs. The International Action Plan for implementing the UN Literacy Decade states that 'literacy for all is at the heart of basic education for all and creating literate environments and societies is essential for ... eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy' (UNESCO 2002).

The Action Plan calls for a renewed vision of literacy that goes beyond the limited view that has hitherto been dominant:

'It has become necessary for all people to learn new literacies and develop the ability to locate, evaluate and effectively use information in multiple manners' (UNESCO 2002, p. 4). In particular, people need to learn skills that are essential in what is now called the 'knowledge economy' and 'information society' where knowledge and technology, including ICTs, are increasingly playing a significant role and causing social transformation to take place at a rapid pace. Personal participation in knowledge- and technology-driven societies begins with literacy (Wagner and Kozma 2005), but requires continuing education and training throughout the lifespan. NFE programs, with their needs-based approach and flexibility, have an important responsibility to ensure that illiterate adults and out-of-school youth and children, as well as other marginalized and disadvantaged groups, are provided opportunities to access ICTs and to utilize them meaningfully to further their socio-economic growth and development.

In 2002, APPEAL launched the ICT-NFE project with financial support from the Japanese Funds-in-Trust to explore the use of ICTs in the delivery of education and skills training to help improve quality of life, alleviate poverty, and achieve community development through community learning centres (CLCs) and other community-based mechanisms. The project piloted the use of ICTs to foster the participation of disadvantaged communities in literacy, basic education, and continuing education activities in Indonesia, Lao PDR, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Uzbekistan.

The ARTC study that was undertaken in 2002 (UNESCO 2002) and the APPEAL study (UNESCO 2005) highlight the following lessons learned regarding the success of NFE programs as well as the potential benefits of integrating ICTs in NFE programs.

The success of NFE programs has been found to depend on the following factors:

1. A broader definition and scope of NFE: Non-formal learning should no longer be viewed in a narrow way but as part of lifelong learning.
2. Community involvement: The involvement of local communities in the planning and management of NFE programs is vital to ensure that the programs are relevant to their needs and to develop a sense of ownership.
3. Local demand: A demand-driven paradigm for initiating NFE programs not only ensures effective use of the resources but also reinforces accountability among participants.
4. Continued government support: Since NFE programs generally meet the educational needs of marginalized groups, they are invariably dependent on support from the government or from donor agencies.

5. Linking literacy with economic activities: It is essential for NFE programs to go beyond literacy programs and offer functional education that can promote economic development and improve the quality of life of individuals and the community.
6. Addressing the issue of poverty alleviation: Since NFE programs target poorer sections of the society, they need to address the issue of poverty alleviation. Well-designed NFE programs have the potential to alleviate problems arising out of poverty.
7. Multi-sectoral participation: While most educational programs tend to be confined to the educational bureaucracy, NFE programs that attempt to link education with the economic and social aspects of people's lives need the collaboration of professionals and administrators from the relevant agencies and organizations in the government and non-government sectors.

Integrating ICTs in NFE programs can help meet these requisites for success thus:

- ICT can be used to develop livelihood skills and thus contribute to poverty alleviation: Livelihood skills training is a common activity in CLCs. The use of ICTs as a tool in such training is an engaging way for learners to develop these livelihood skills (UNESCO 2005).
 - ICT is a tool for capacity-building: More specifically, ICT can be used as an effective and affordable tool in the professional development of NFE teachers. This is important because although qualified and trained teachers are the key to quality learning and increased learner motivation, in many countries professional expertise, particularly for the provision of non-formal literacy education, is limited and thinly distributed, and training in teaching and learning in NFE contexts consists of one-off programs and lack follow-up and sustainability.
- NFE programs can also help develop the digital skills that are now required in public service at the central, provincial, district, and community levels.
- ICT can facilitate documentation and information sharing: ICT can facilitate the print, visual, and video documentation that is needed for the dissemination of information about successful NFE projects. When undertaken by the members of the community, this documentation can help foster a sense of community pride and ownership and ensure continuing support and enthusiastic participation. And while ICTs can
- promote information sharing between communities, they can also be effectively used to mobilize policy dialogue on the use of ICT for community empowerment.
- ICT can be used to facilitate the process of networking among organizations engaged in the design and delivery of NFE programs: It is essential for the government and other organizations to coordinate their NFE activities to maximize available resources and expertise, including ICT equipment.
 - ICT tools can improve the overall effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation: Monitoring and evaluation should be built into the entire planning and management of NFE programs.
 - ICT can be used in promoting literacy for community empowerment: Dighe and Reddi (2006) present case studies from India highlighting the effective use of technology to empower rural women in particular. One case study is of the Deccan Development Society (DDS), which has trained poor *dalit* (the Indian social classification for the poorest and the 'untouchables' in the caste system) women in the Medak district of Andhra Pradesh, India, to use video technologies to represent their lives and redefine their status. In Machnour village, DDS has set up a community radio station with a 100-watt FM transmitter and a 30-kilometre radius reach where, with the support of UNESCO, a small team of *dalit* women has recorded 300 hours of programming on issues relating to women's empowerment, agricultural needs of semi-arid regions, public health and hygiene, indigenous knowledge systems, biodiversity, and food security. They have also recorded local songs and drama. In Ahmedabad, India, Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA) has been using video as a tool for women's empowerment since the mid-1980s. Video is used as a medium to share information with the women members of SEWA and also as a tool for training and teaching new skills and for reaching policymakers.
- Currently there are three types of learning spaces where ICTs are used to enhance NFE: telecentres, Community Multimedia Centres (CMCs) and CLCs.
- A telecentre is a public space where community members can access telephones, computers, the Internet, and other digital technologies that can help them gather information and communicate with others. The simplest kind of telecentre is a booth in which the owner of a cellphone sells user-time. This has worked well in countries like Bangladesh where the Grameen Bank has been lending money to rural women to buy cellphones since 1997. A telecentre has a limited educational function but it is empowering to those who are enabled to access information easily. In the case of Grameen Bank, it has also helped in

alleviating poverty by augmenting the income of the village women in Bangladesh.

CMCs are non-profit telecentres that aim to promote community empowerment and address the problem of the digital divide. Also known as a community e-centre (CeC), a CMC combines community telecentre facilities (computers with Internet and email, phone, fax, and photocopying services) with a community radio run by local people in the local language. The radio, which is low-cost and easy to operate, not only informs, educates and entertains, but also empowers the community by giving a strong public voice to the voiceless and encouraging greater accountability in public affairs. CMCs provide a gateway to active membership in knowledge societies by enabling everyone to gain access to information and communication tools that they can use to improve the quality of their lives.

UNESCO (2007) defines a CLC as ‘a local place of learning outside the formal education system ... usually set up and managed by local people for local people’. CLCs, which may be located in urban and rural areas, ‘are home-grown institutions that ... provide education programs that address the specific needs and desires of the populations they serve’. Their aim ‘is to help individuals empower themselves and promote community development through lifelong education for all people in the community, including adults, youth, and children of all ages. A CLC does not necessarily require new infrastructure, but can operate from an existing health center, temple, mosque, primary school or other suitable venue’.

Of all APPEAL-supported regional projects none has generated greater enthusiasm among APEC member states than the CLC project. Initiated in the late 1990s, it has attracted over 20 countries in the region to try out community-based models for learning at the local level. Several countries that have piloted the development of CLCs with the support of APPEAL have now developed models that are being replicated with the support of communities, governments, and other partners.

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS OF ICT-SUPPORTED NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Simply using ICTs in NFE programs does not make for effective NFE programs. For the potential benefits of ICT integration in NFE to be realized, several factors need to be considered.

The first of these is the need for a coherent policy for integrating ICT in NFE. A meta-survey of ICT integration in 44 countries in the Asia Pacific region conducted by UNESCO Bangkok in 2003–2004 (Farrell and Wachholz 2004) showed

countries at different stages with regard to policies pertaining to the integration of ICT in the education system. While all of the countries surveyed had stated that the development of ICT capacity was important to national development, few had grappled with the policy questions related to ICT applications in education, especially in NFE. Few policymakers demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that ICT would be adopted at a mass level.

A policy framework is essential as it provides a vision of desired outcomes and outlines a roadmap for how these outcomes are to be achieved. In such a framework, the vision of NFE would have to be broad-based and all-encompassing and within the overall framework of lifelong learning. Accreditation frameworks for the integration of NFE and formal education would have to be worked out, particularly because at present in many countries these frameworks are either weak or non-existent and NFE is marginalized. Also, a gender equity perspective would have to inform policy formulation to ensure that women as well as men have equal access to ICT and ICT-supported education programs, and gender concerns are addressed at all stages or phases of such programs.

A second factor for success of ICT-supported NFE is providing technology infrastructure and ensuring access. ICT-based non-formal literacy programs have often suffered from inadequate infrastructure and technical support. This was highlighted in a study on the use of ICT in education in seven of the E-9 countries (Bangladesh, Brazil, Egypt, India, Mexico, Pakistan, and the People’s Republic of China) undertaken by UNESCO (UNESCO 2006). The study recommended that the Literacy Decade should be considered as an opportune time for policymakers to set up the required infrastructure — for example, phone lines, reliable electricity supply, and connectivity.

While CLCs are regarded as a viable strategy for giving rural communities access to ICT, there is a need for innovative and cost-effective ways of broadening access to prevent the exclusion of marginalized communities. Women’s access to ICT is a major problem in some communities. ICT should be located in local institutions that poor women feel they can access without difficulty or restriction (Dighe and Reddi 2006).

Landlines and desktop computers are available in multi-purpose community access centres (e.g. telecentres, schools), but there are difficulties in making them available in poor communities. Ongoing development of low-cost technologies is a key to provide ICT for the poor. Currently, Wireless Fidelity (WiFi) promises to provide low-cost broadband ‘last mile’ connectivity in densely populated areas and wireless mobile text messaging is spreading in a range of countries and commercial

and public service uses. Research, development, and piloting of low-cost technologies amenable to poor communities would need ongoing support, particularly from social and commercial entrepreneurs.

A third factor in the success of ICT-supported NFE programs is to make them people-driven rather than technology-driven. Case studies undertaken in different countries of the region demonstrate this. Often, however, there is a tendency to invest in technology without making a parallel investment in people. According to Reddi (2004), ‘the bulk of the investment in any project generally goes toward overhead costs and few resources are left for project activities. A parallel investment in people, in good quality social research and community mobilization and involvement, rarely takes place.’

A process of de-mystification of technology has to take place so that poor people can begin to understand how technology functions and the possibilities it has to offer. This process cannot be rushed and people’s pace of learning has to be respected. This has particular relevance for women as they would first need to get over the perception that technology is for men and not for them. It would be necessary for women to feel comfortable with technology, for they are likely to be hesitant in adopting new technology unless they can begin to use technology to respond to their needs.

The impact of ICT also depends on attitudes, expectations, organizational climate, and management styles. It is possible that intermediary organizations implementing ICT projects are hierarchical and bureaucratic in their style of functioning. Any hands-on experience in the use of technology can become a major hurdle in such organizations, and overcoming resistance and negative attitudes is a challenge that has to be overcome. The bottom line is that the focus of ICT-supported NFE programs has to be on people, on organizations and processes, and not just on technology.

Effective planning and program design is the fourth factor in the success of ICT-supported NFE. There is a need to take stock of existing infrastructure and to plan for hardware and software possibilities, taking into account connectivity, affordability, and capability. Equally important is the need to understand the existing information systems of the poor before ICT is introduced. There is a need to understand how ICT and culture intersect, because cultural factors can be a hindrance to ICT adoption in rural areas. This is particularly true for women. Green (2004) therefore advocates that great care be taken to ensure gender-sensitive program design.

Community participation in planning and designing ICT-supported interventions is vital. Experiences in many countries of the region have shown that ICT projects are more useful and

sustainable when communities support and commit to them. However, it is important to recognize that communities are not homogenous and they are often divided along class, gender, and sectarian lines. It is necessary to ensure sustained and ongoing consultations with members of the community, particularly the poor members and women among them, to enable them to help make crucial decisions with regard to physical location, timing, and the use of ICT. The poor benefit from ICT when they know and control the technology and related know-how. Rather than simply *giving* the poor access to information, project designers and implementers should *listen* to the ‘voice’ of the poor in various decision-making processes.

Capacity-building and training comprise the fifth success factor in ICT-enhanced NFE. There is a need to train NFE functionaries, program administrators, and support staff. Moreover, it is necessary to provide skills training programs of various kinds to ensure that the poor use ICT effectively. Malaysia’s experience has shown the importance of organizing training in basic computer use so that the rural communities are not left behind in the nation’s ICT development process. Such training programs need to be organized on an ongoing basis to ensure operational use of ICT as well as their maintenance and upkeep by the members of the community. This would help instil a sense of ownership among the community.

Women would require gender-sensitive training and ongoing support. Women trainers have been found to be effective in training other women because aside from passing along skills, women trainers also serve as role models.

In addition, the potential of ICT for enhancing and supporting professional development of non-formal education, literacy and development personnel, planners, administrators, and educators should be explored.

A sixth factor for success in ICT-supported NFE is the development of content that is relevant to the learners. ICT can play an important role in stimulating interest and engaging learners, and it can be a useful tool in developing learning materials that are culturally and linguistically appropriate. One such literacy course offered by a CMC in the Madurai district of Tamil Nadu, India enables learners to create their own personalized content using digital cameras, computers, presentation software, and CD-ROMs. The successful experiences of many countries using technologies like television, radio, and video have shown that even ‘low tech’ devices can be very useful in creating a literacy conducive environment (UNESCO 2006), with women, for example, using these technologies in creative combinations with traditional media such as folk songs, dance, and theatre for self-expression and communication.

A seventh factor for successful ICT-supported NFE is planning for sustainability. Because their operating costs tend to be high, most ICT projects tend to close down as soon as the project funds are used up. It is therefore essential to address the problem of sustainability at the planning stage itself. The ‘user pays’ model is the default strategy for generating income for operations and maintenance. However, this business model tends to marginalize the poor, particularly the women among them, because they cannot afford to pay the user fees. Partnerships among stakeholders that will draw on the strengths and assets of various groups and ensure the coordination of efforts of various institutions, ministries, and organizations could address this problem.

Ensuring multi-stakeholder partnerships is the eighth factor for success in ICT-enhanced NFE programs. In such partnerships, the principal role of the government would be to facilitate the creation and equitable diffusion of infrastructure and the adaptation and scaling up of successful pilot projects. In addition, the public sector should provide the lead through strong policy interventions and substantial public investment (Gurumurthy and Singh 2005). The private sector could play an important role in supporting development of content and applications in the local languages. NGOs could partner with the government to ensure the participation of various disadvantaged groups, and to facilitate capacity-building.

The ninth factor for successful implementation of ICT-supported NFE programs is continuous monitoring and evaluation. The literature on ICT-supported development in general tends to be anecdotal and descriptive and there is a paucity of data from well-designed evaluation and research studies. While this is changing, it bears emphasizing that there is a need to undertake honest stock-taking of what worked and what did not work and for what reasons. Formative evaluation is necessary to identify the problems or stumbling blocks so that timely corrections can be taken to ensure that the objectives of the ICT project are met. Considering the multi-dimensionality of non-formal education, an interdisciplinary research approach would be useful to understand the complexities of ICT for NFE projects. Ethnographic action research (Tachhi et al. 2003) has been found to be useful in understanding the information needs of the poor in specific contexts.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

In concluding the meta-survey of ICT integration in education in the Asia Pacific region, Farrell and Wachholz (2004) aver that although the majority of countries in the region are still in the early stages of adopting ICT tools in educational systems, the

situation is changing rapidly. A shift is taking place from donor-supported, NGO-led, small-scale, pilot projects to systemic integration informed by national government policies and multi-stakeholder-led implementation processes. However, what is disconcerting is that these changes are taking place in the school sector only and the spin-offs in the non-formal sector are not as evident.

The costs associated with setting up ICT infrastructure are forcing many governments to make difficult choices. For most national governments, the priority is primary education. Ironically, the pressure to achieve EFA goals could be forcing a number of national governments to sideline the education of out-of-school youth and non-literate adults. Similarly, the pressure to produce the necessary human capital for a ‘knowledge-based’ economy is resulting in greater investments being made in formal higher education systems.

While governments worldwide have signed up to the UN goal of a 50 percent reduction in illiteracy by 2015, actual investments in the programs that will deliver these goals are abysmally small. Torres (2002) laments that there is a mismatch between rhetoric and practice even among the international agencies as the ‘expanded’ and ‘renewed’ visions proposed in all of the major recent international declarations and commitments — in basic education (EFA 1990), adult education and learning (CONFINTEA V 1997), and literacy (UN Literacy Decade 2002) — tend to remain on paper and are contradicted by the same international agencies that promoted them and that provide technical and financial assistance to the South.

But since a significant proportion of the population in developing countries is out of school and without the literacy skills that will enable them to contribute to economic and social development, governments ignore the non-formal education sector only at their own peril. To develop a cohesive society, increase national competitiveness, and achieve sustainable growth and development, governments need to put in place NFE programs that focus on developing social capital among marginalized communities (Lizardi 2002). Non-formal educational programs for youth and adults should become one of the global priorities of our time.

For this to happen, the formation of alliances among stakeholders across all sectors is vital. The Global Campaign for Education, a coalition of NGOs and trade unions working in over 100 countries for the right to free, good quality education for all, is attempting to play an advocacy role. The hope is that multi-sectoral partnerships and alliances will create a groundswell that can influence national governments and international agencies to honour their commitments, and ignite a global movement that will make quality education truly a right for all.

NOTE

1. Rogers (2004) places much greater value on informal learning which for him is not always unintentional (as previously understood), but which is a natural activity that is continuous and highly individualized and contextualized. It is mainly through informal learning, rather than formal or non-formal learning, that a whole range of perceptions, attitudes, and skills are developed.

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