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Social development: literacy for life: shaping future agendas

Literacy for life: shaping future agendas and education for democracy

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution [71/166](#), entitled “Literacy for life: shaping future agendas”. In the resolution, the Assembly requested the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to continue its coordinating and catalysing role to provide support to Member States in enhancing capacities for policy formulation, programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as sharing information and knowledge on policies, programmes and progress in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal targets connected with literacy, especially target 4.6 on youth and adult literacy. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the Director General of UNESCO, to submit to it at its seventy-third session a report on the implementation of the resolution.

Literacy is recognized as a foundation for lifelong learning and sustainable development. Despite progress in the field, a substantial number of young people and adults, especially women, have poor literacy skills, preventing them from participating fully in society and in the economy. Many children and adolescents do not achieve minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics at school, creating a large population of adults with low-level literacy, a situation that requires special policy and funding attention. Target 4.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals recognizes this problem and reaffirms the commitment to achieving universal literacy through lifelong learning. UNESCO continues to support Member States in developing capacities in literacy policy formulation, programme implementation, innovation, and monitoring and assessment.

* [A/73/150](#).

** The present report was submitted late to reflect the most recent information.



The present report also addresses the implementation of General Assembly resolution [71/8](#) entitled “Education for democracy”. In its resolution [67/18](#), the Assembly invited Governments, agencies and organizations of the United Nations system and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to intensify their efforts to promote education for democracy. In its resolutions [69/268](#) and [71/8](#), the Assembly re-emphasized the importance of intensifying efforts to promote education for democracy and requested the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the Director General of UNESCO, to report to it at its seventy-first and seventy-third sessions, respectively, on the implementation of the resolutions.

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 71/166 entitled “Literacy for life: shaping future agendas”, the General Assembly expressed its conviction that literacy is crucial to the acquisition by every child, young person and adult of the essential life skills that will enable them to address the challenges that they may face in life and represents an essential condition of lifelong learning, which is an indispensable means for effective participation in the knowledge societies and economies of the twenty-first century.

2. Although progress has been made, 750 million adults around the world remain non-literate (and the majority are women);¹ many more do not have sufficient literacy proficiency to meet the demands of their work and social lives. Worldwide, an estimated 22 per cent of young people aged 15 to 24 are not in employment, education or training, 77 per cent of them being young women.² The global adult literacy rate for the population aged 15 years and older was 86 per cent in 2016, while the youth literacy rate (for those aged 15 to 24 years) was 91 per cent. South Asia is home to almost half of the global illiterate population (49 per cent), while 27 per cent of illiterate adults live in sub-Saharan Africa, 10 per cent in East and South-East Asia, 9 per cent in North Africa and West Asia, and 4 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Less than 2 per cent of the global illiterate population lives in the remaining regions combined (Central Asia, Europe and North America and Oceania). Youth literacy rates are generally higher than adult literacy rates, reflecting the recent increase in access to primary education among younger generations.¹

3. The description of the state of literacy contained in the paragraphs above may not even properly reflect the scale of the population whose right to quality education has not been fulfilled, especially if the expanded notion of literacy as a continuum of proficiency levels is applied. Despite the increase in enrolment in primary education, more than 617 million children and adolescents are not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics.³ Low-level literacy skills often go hand in hand with poor vocational, citizenship and life skills. Moreover, in a rapidly changing world, previously acquired literacy and numeracy skills and competencies can rapidly become insufficient or outdated.

4. Given this scenario, urgent action needs to be taken to scale up literacy efforts worldwide and operationalize the expanded notion of literacy by establishing and strengthening national education systems to enable individuals to acquire and continuously improve their proficiency skills in literacy and numeracy. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is supporting the literacy efforts of Member States by targeting youth and adults with low levels of literacy, with a particular focus on female adolescents and adult women in Africa.

5. Recognizing the importance of youth and adult literacy, national Governments worldwide have agreed to include a specific target on youth and adult literacy and numeracy as one of the 10 targets of Sustainable Development Goal 4. In target 4.6 Member States are requested to ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy by 2030. The progress made towards improving policies, provision and outcomes on literacy must, therefore, be analysed and reported on within the broader framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and Sustainable Development Goal 4 in particular.

¹ See UNESCO Institute for Statistics, “Literacy rates continue to rise from one generation to the next”, Fact sheet No. 45, (Montreal, Canada, September 2017).

² International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017: Paths to a Better Working Future* (Geneva, 2017).

³ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, “More than one-half of children and adolescents are not learning worldwide”, Fact Sheet No. 46 (Montreal, September 2017).

II. Advancing the global literacy agenda

6. As spelled out in the Incheon Declaration of the World Education Forum 2015 and the Education 2030 Framework for Action,⁴ the principles, strategies and actions of target 4.6 are underpinned by a contemporary understanding of literacy not as a simple dichotomy of “literate” versus “illiterate”, but as a continuum of proficiency levels that depend on specific contexts. The notion of literacy as a learning continuum of different proficiency levels has been one of the most significant developments with regard to how literacy is conceptualized. It regards literacy not as a stand-alone set of skills that can be developed and completed within a short time frame, but as a continuous process of learning throughout life. This expanded notion of literacy obviously influences policies and programmes: the focus is now on improving literacy proficiency levels and providing learning opportunities for all throughout life, and not on project-based literacy programmes focusing on basic literacy skills.

7. Moreover, literacy and numeracy skills are now considered contextual. Multisectoral partnerships reflect this integrated and holistic approach to literacy and are necessary to respond to the diverse needs of learners while linking literacy to other areas of sustainable development — in particular, environmental sustainability, gender equality, skills for work and entrepreneurship, and peace (Sustainable Development Goals 3, 5, 8, 9 and 16, respectively).⁵ In addition, rapidly evolving digital technologies have had far-reaching effects on work and social life. This has created a need for lifelong learning programmes aimed at improving digital skills; including higher-order skills for manipulating, interpreting, displaying and communicating information in different forms, including through written texts.

The Sustainable Development Goal Education 2030 Steering Committee

Established in 2016, the Sustainable Development Goal Education 2030 Steering Committee is the main global coordination mechanism on Sustainable Development Goal 4 that harmonizes and strengthens support to countries and partners and drives action to achieve the education-related targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Given the scale and ambition of the Agenda, this multi-stakeholder mechanism provides strategic guidance to Member States and the education community, makes recommendations for catalytic action, advocates for adequate financing and monitors progress towards education targets through the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the *Global Education Monitoring Report*. It is not only a channel for strengthening partnerships but also provides two-way communication for global and regional action.

The Steering Committee is composed of Member States, the convening agencies of the World Education Forum 2015 (UNESCO, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children’s Fund, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the World Bank and the International Labour Organization), the Global Partnership for Education, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, regional organizations, teacher organizations and civil society networks, in addition to representatives from the private sector, foundations, academia and youth and student organizations.

⁴ Available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002456/245656E.pdf>.

⁵ See UNESCO, *Reading the Past, Writing the Future: Fifty Years of Promoting Literacy* (Paris, 2017).

The road map for achieving the education goal is the Education 2030 Framework for Action, adopted by the international community in November 2015. The Framework stipulates that periodic meetings on global education for all, aligned with the meeting schedule of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, will be organized by UNESCO in consultation with the Sustainable Development Goal Education 2030 Steering Committee.

The next global education for all meeting, to be hosted by Belgium, will be held in Brussels from 3 to 5 December 2018. The high-level forum will bring the international community together to take stock of progress and identify strategic priority areas requiring political guidance and intervention for the effective achievement of the education-related targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The global education for all meeting in 2018 will focus on the theme of the high-level political forum for 2019, namely, “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”, and will review progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4, including through its interlinkages with the other goals.

III. Six strategic areas to advance the global literacy agenda

8. Employing the expanded and holistic notion of literacy provided above, the present section describes the actions carried out by UNESCO in response to General Assembly resolution 71/166 since the seventy-first session of the Assembly in 2016, in six strategic areas:

- (a) Improving national education policies, strategies and plans for youth and adult literacy;
- (b) Scaling up literacy initiatives for girls and women;
- (c) Improving the quality and delivery of literacy programmes and promoting innovative approaches to literacy;
- (d) Enhancing literacy assessment, monitoring and evaluation systems and capacities;
- (e) Furthering research and knowledge creation and advocacy for youth and adult literacy at the global, regional and national levels;
- (f) Learning cities to promote inclusive and equitable societies.

9. During the reporting period, UNESCO continued to coordinate, advocate for and catalyse action towards the implementation of target 4.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals. UNESCO also provided support to Member States, in close collaboration with partners, in building capacities for policy review and development, programme design and implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, to enhance youth and adult literacy. Specific actions are outlined below.

A. Improving national education policies, strategies and plans for youth and adult literacy

10. Given the persistent literacy challenge around the globe, it is critical to ensure that youth and adult literacy is adequately reflected in education sector policies, strategies and plans and receives sufficient funding so that efficient and relevant literacy learning opportunities are developed. This calls for a sector-wide and cross-

sectoral lifelong learning approach involving stakeholders from all relevant fields, at the national and local levels, representing all groups of society, as well as a comprehensive governance and monitoring structure.

11. UNESCO, in collaboration with international and governmental and non-governmental partners, provided technical support to Member States to strengthen the capacities of policymakers and planners at the national and subnational levels. The technical support involved conducting global training, developing customized project-based activities, building the capacities of national institutions, policymakers and planners, providing systematic reviews and improving existing policies. UNESCO also developed a new e-learning course for national policymakers and planners with the purpose of equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to mainstream adult literacy and non-formal education into education sector plans. Another example of policy improvement and development is the leading role played by UNESCO in engaging with indigenous peoples, including support for mother-tongue-based multilingual education.

12. UNESCO also played a critical role in the development and improvement of regional and national education policies on specific literacy issues. This included the development of normative frameworks for language in education policies, such as bilingual literacy education policies and teacher-training policies for literacy and basic education for children, youth and adults. The concrete results of the technical support in this area can be seen in several promising cases in West Africa, which were developed in close collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States and the ministries of education of its States members. In Senegal, for example, national partners received technical support in reviewing existing teacher-training policies and practices to develop a comprehensive normative framework that has since resulted in the development of pre-service training modules for teachers of literacy and basic education for children and adults.

13. In Asia and the Pacific, UNESCO provided assistance to selected countries to leverage their educational policies, including adult competency frameworks and programmes for community learning centres. Literacy is one of the priorities for South Asian countries under the Framework for Action. UNESCO has therefore been working towards organizing a subregional meeting on literacy, which is scheduled to be held in late 2018.

14. Several countries developed or promoted national strategies on literacy from a lifelong learning perspective. The Ministry of Education and Human Development of Mozambique established a national curriculum for primary education for youth and adults as well as learning assessment tools for adult literacy and education. These normative documents are aligned with the country's adult literacy and education strategy and the gender strategy for the education sector. In South Sudan, the pastoralist livelihood and education project framework was developed with the support of UNESCO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations as an important milestone in ensuring an integrated approach to establishing a normative framework for the provision of education services to marginalized pastoralist communities. In India, the National Literacy Mission Authority, the Ministry of Human Resource Development and UNESCO collaborated in a shared objective to promote literacy from a lifelong learning perspective as a means to promote sustainable peace and development. Furthermore, UNESCO provided technical support for policy review and development in Kenya, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania and many other countries with the financial support of China, Finland, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Sweden and others.

15. At the subnational and local levels, UNESCO also contributed to policy development and improvement. In Pakistan, UNESCO played a critical role in the development of provincial literacy and non-formal education policies in the provinces of Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan because of the decentralization of education in the country. With the technical assistance of UNESCO, an inclusive literacy and non-formal education policy and strategy was also developed for the Abuja region in Nigeria.

B. Scaling up literacy initiatives for girls and women

16. The benefits of developing the education and literacy of women and girls are well documented. They include higher participation in the labour market; reduced fertility rates and improved health; delayed marriages; the reduced likelihood of contracting the human immunodeficiency virus for girls (and boys); increased earnings for women and associated poverty reduction; improved child and family health and nutrition and the associated benefits for quality of life; increased productivity; and reduced pressure on social services for health. Literate women are also more likely to enrol and keep their children, and particularly their daughters, in school.

17. To address this challenge, UNESCO worked with Member States to ensure that education sector policies and plans included literacy programme activities that targeted female adolescents and young and adult women. This issue concerns every region of the world where literacy rates are at the lowest levels and in which there is a greater proportion of out-of-school youth (e.g., sub-Saharan and North Africa, West and South Asia). Other efforts to scale up literacy actions for girls and women required UNESCO and partners to mobilize additional resources, as detailed below.

18. Through the UNESCO Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education "Better Life, Better Future" initiative, gender-sensitive and gender-responsive literacy and basic education policies and programmes were developed in Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Iraq, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, Timor-Leste, Togo and the United Republic of Tanzania. From 2016 to 2018, UNESCO worked with Burundi, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mozambique, South Sudan, the Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania to integrate gender-responsive literacy and basic skills into their national development strategies in order to support peace, social cohesion and sustainable development.

19. Through the implementation of the UNESCO Malala Fund for Girls' Right to Education initiative, 10 projects in Cambodia, Egypt, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, the United Republic of Tanzania and Viet Nam were supported to widen access to education, improve retention and completion rates and enhance the quality of education for girls. Through this initiative, Cambodia implemented a project to improve the literacy skills of young female garment workers by providing literacy classes in the workplace and developing quality literacy learning and training materials for use in the workplace. In Egypt, integrated literacy classes at community learning centres improved girls' and women's literacy skills and knowledge of health, livelihood and citizenship matters. In Mozambique, there were improvements in the programme design, management and evaluation of literacy programmes targeting vulnerable women and their families in pilot communities in the northern part of the country. In Mauritania, efforts focused on the expansion of literacy and skills development opportunities for girls and women through community learning centre programmes and the reintegration of out-of-school youth into formal education. In Pakistan, provincial education institutions were supported to implement literacy

initiatives in underprivileged areas such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where literacy rates among girls and women are extremely low.

20. The innovative literacy and education programmes of UNESCO also included a focus on gender equality and justice. In the context of the project on advancing mobile literacy learning, funded by the Microsoft Corporation, UNESCO employed technological solutions to improve the quality of and expand access to literacy programmes through information and communication technologies. In Egypt and Ethiopia, in particular, these programmes were offered to 900 women between the ages of 15 and 45. In Egypt, a digital learning tool was based on the El Mara'a We El Hayah (woman and life) literacy curriculum, which integrates literacy with personal health, empowerment, life skills and digital competencies. In Bangladesh and Mexico, most of the beneficiaries of technology-based literacy programmes were women and girls.

21. With the support of the Governments of Finland, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Sweden, UNESCO provided technical support to the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan in order to develop capacities and improve the quality and relevance of literacy programmes for young and older women, especially in rural communities. Concerted efforts were also made to hire and train female literacy facilitators, establish more literacy classes for women in rural communities and develop gender-responsive curricula and learning materials. UNESCO further supported the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan in systematically planning, improving and evaluating literacy interventions with a gender lens.

22. Another example of the work of UNESCO in South Sudan is the support it provides to out-of-school girls and boys as part of the Community Girls' Schools initiative. With support from the Global Partnership for Education and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in South Sudan, UNESCO supported 213 community girls' schools in 2017 in enrolling 6,781 children (4,280 girls and 2,501 boys) who otherwise would not have had an opportunity to attend school. The initiative uses an accelerated learning approach that allows learners to complete the normal five-year course of elementary education in four years, thereby encouraging girls and boys who may have started school late to catch up and continue their education. This approach has helped South Sudan to expand the provision of literacy and numeracy instruction to marginalized communities and has contributed to closing the gender gap in the enrolment of girls and boys.

23. The focus on women and literacy was also reflected in UNESCO publications. In particular, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning published a study entitled *Promoting Health and Literacy for Women's Empowerment*, which presented the strong links between health, well-being, women's empowerment and education, focusing on the role of literacy, and highlighted the benefits of integrated approaches to literacy for women.⁶

C. Improving the quality and delivery of literacy programmes and promoting innovative approaches to literacy

24. UNESCO is committed to supporting countries in improving the quality and delivery of literacy programmes. In terms of quality, UNESCO worked with regional centres, national partners and institutions in the following areas: establishing and improving curriculum frameworks and standards; creating flexible learning pathways and equivalency frameworks; improving the management and monitoring of literacy programmes; and improving the training of literacy facilitators and adult educators.

⁶ Available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002456/245698e.pdf>.

Several innovative interventions in the areas of family literacy and intergenerational learning and the use of information and communication technologies to support literacy learning warrant special mention in the present report. Those interventions are described below.

25. Based on successful practices in South Africa and Uganda, a family literacy and intergenerational learning approach has been developed to improve the literacy skills of parents and children in preschool and primary school settings. Family and intergenerational literacy programmes create synergies between early childhood care and education, primary education and adult learning and education. Intergenerational approaches develop the literacy, numeracy and foundational skills of both adults and children and empower disadvantaged families to support their children more effectively at school. UNESCO has developed systematic practical guidelines on how to design and pilot such an approach. Following the publication of the guidelines, UNESCO has undertaken related capacity-building in Ethiopia and the Gambia since 2017, with the financial support of Germany. In Mozambique, with the support of the Malala Fund for Girls' Right to Education, a contextualized gender-sensitive pedagogical model for family literacy programmes has been implemented. Instructional and learning manuals were developed, integrating basic knowledge of nutrition and health and positive parenting. National education staff, including literacy teachers, were trained in the delivery of these gender-sensitive family literacy programmes.

26. Since 2015, UNESCO has supported the implementation of the project on advancing mobile literacy and learning in selected communities in Bangladesh, Egypt, Ethiopia and Mexico. Funded by the Microsoft Corporation, the project is aimed at improving the literacy skills of disadvantaged populations with the support of contextually relevant technological solutions. The planning, implementation and monitoring of project activities have been guided by the principles of Government and community ownership and by bottom-up, participatory approaches. Through this project, digital materials have been collected and new materials developed to support literacy learning as part of a blended learning approach linked to governmental and non-governmental literacy and livelihood programmes. Preliminary findings on the impact of the project were presented at the UNESCO Mobile Learning Week in March 2018, with an emphasis on the extent to which the literacy and digital skills of youth and adult learners have been developed in those four countries.

27. Since 2016, UNESCO, in partnership with Pearson, has been advancing the UNESCO-Pearson Initiative for Literacy: "Improved Livelihoods in a Digital World". The Initiative is aimed at investigating, documenting and sharing new approaches that enable youth and adults with low levels of literacy to profit from inclusive digital technologies, which, in turn, will strengthen their literacy and digital skills. A landscape review was undertaken to discover how, if at all, technology is currently designed to be inclusive and user-friendly, including for those with a lower level of digital and literacy skills. The initiatives span a range of areas — health, agriculture, government, displaced populations and green and environmental practices — and each illustrates how appropriately designed digital solutions can create entry points into the knowledge society for people with low literacy levels. The landscape review and case studies will be reflected in forthcoming UNESCO guidelines, notably on ways to identify more inclusive digital solutions which will help to develop the literacy skills of users and improve their livelihoods in the twenty-first century. The guidelines will be addressed to digital solution providers, implementing and donor agencies, development partners and Governments.

28. Within the framework of a regional literacy agenda, and in order to build national capacities in the Arab States, UNESCO increased its support to the Regional Centre for Adult Education in Egypt. UNESCO worked with Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania

and the Sudan on capacity-building for youth and adult literacy programmes and activities. The Organization also worked with Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic on education targeting out-of-school children and youth. National literacy campaigns were initiated in Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia and the Sudan. In South-East Asian countries, UNESCO strengthened its partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which adopted the Declaration on Strengthening Education Systems for Out-of-School Children and Youth⁷ in 2016. To translate this commitment into action, UNESCO supported the evaluation and improvement of equivalency programmes for children and youth in Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Timor-Leste. UNESCO also supported capacity-building for equivalency programmes in Bangladesh, Nepal, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.

29. With regard to adult literacy programmes in Asia and the Pacific, UNESCO provided support to Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Pakistan and Timor-Leste in enhancing and updating literacy curricula and building the capacities of education officials and literacy providers and educators. With the support of UNESCO, the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan developed and validated the national youth and adult basic education curriculum framework and a set of performance indicators for basic proficiency levels in literacy and numeracy, equivalent to grade 3 of formal general education. In the next few years, the Government of Afghanistan will establish a curriculum framework for youth and adult basic education to align the performance indicators in literacy and numeracy equivalent with grade 9 of the formal school system. Based on the basic literacy and numeracy level, the capacities of literacy curriculum and material developers in designing learner-centred and activity-based instructional and learning materials in Dari and Pashto were systematically developed. In Pakistan, UNESCO, in collaboration with other development partners, supported the provincial authorities of Balochistan and Sindh in developing a non-formal education curriculum, textbooks, assessment tools and an equivalency mechanism to improve the quality of literacy provision and outcomes. Moreover, the Allama Iqbal Open University in Pakistan was supported in developing a nationally accredited teacher training certificate course on non-formal education with the objective of improving the delivery of quality literacy programmes. Curriculum writers in the Southern African subregion (Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe) participated in two regional workshops on literacy material development. A partnership project between UNESCO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on pastoralist livelihoods and education in South Sudan combined livelihood interventions with literacy components and developed a literacy and mainstream public-school education curriculum suited to the pastoralist way of life.

30. In 2017, the celebration of International Literacy Day and the UNESCO International Literacy Prizes focused on the theme "Literacy in a digital world". Both provided an opportunity to review the literacy skills required to participate in increasingly digitally mediated societies and the implications for policies, practices, monitoring and evaluation, as well as literate-friendly environments. Potential risks to privacy and security and to cultural and linguistic diversity were also explored, and consideration was given to how to minimize those risks and ensure equity and equality in order to turn the digital divide into a digital opportunity. Numerous events were held at the national, regional and global levels to celebrate International Literacy Day. Participants in the UNESCO international conference on the occasion of International Literacy Day on the theme "Literacy in a digital world", which was held in Paris on

⁷ Available from <http://asean.org/asean-declaration-on-strengthening-education-for-out-of-school-children-and-youthooscy/>.

8 September 2017, broadly agreed that literacy today includes digital skills but recognized that understanding of literacy is context-specific and evolves as the surrounding environment changes. UNESCO International Literacy Prizes were granted to programmes that exemplify various effective ways of responding to transformations in literacy learning brought about by digital technology, in Canada, Colombia, Jordan, Pakistan and South Africa.

D. Enhancing literacy assessment, monitoring and evaluation systems and capacities

31. The importance of valid and reliable evidence is critical for improved literacy policies and programmes. During the reporting period, UNESCO continued to monitor literacy progress and update statistical information and publications through the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the annual *Global Education Monitoring Report* and the third *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*. As the Sustainable Development Goal 2030 Education Steering Committee shifts global attention to relevant and effective learning outcomes, five global indicators (4.1.1, 4.2.1, 4.4.1, 4.6.1 and 4.7.1) focus on learning outcomes. In this context, Member States will need to develop and produce more accurate data based on the measurement of learning outcomes. Such data will also help to improve policymaking and to mobilize and allocate resources for targeted literacy interventions at the global and national levels.

32. With this in mind, the Global Alliance for Monitoring Learning was set up by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and officially launched in 2016 with the objective of achieving a global consensus on the frameworks and methodology of measuring learning outcomes to report on five of the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 4. One of the targets focuses on youth and adult literacy, and its associated global indicator (4.6.1) is aimed at measuring the percentage of the population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional literacy and numeracy skills. As part of the work undertaken by the Alliance, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, in close collaboration with the Institute for Statistics, continued facilitating work on the development of global measurement frameworks on literacy and numeracy. It has taken a two-pronged approach to the work by, on the one hand, facilitating the development of global measurement frameworks for literacy and numeracy to enable countries to collect reliable data and report on indicator 4.6.1, and, on the other hand, strengthening national capacities to develop frameworks, systems and tools to measure proficiency levels in youth and adult literacy and numeracy. Since 2017, the Institute for Lifelong Learning and the Institute for Statistics have organized two expert meetings, in November 2017 and May 2018, to advance work on developing a measurement strategy on indicator 4.6.1. Initial proposals on the development of a global expanded assessment and reporting framework for literacy and numeracy are being discussed.

33. The development of effective policies and relevant programmes is hindered by the absence of solid evidence on the learning outcomes of participants in literacy programmes. To fill this gap, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning has worked in close cooperation with UNESCO field offices, regional bureaux and partners on developing and strengthening national capacities and establishing regional standards to measure literacy learning outcomes through a project on the theme “Action research measuring learning outcomes of adult literacy programmes”. The project is aimed at providing national policymakers and development partners with reliable data on youth and adult literacy learning outcomes and to establish a mechanism for assessing the learning outcomes of youth and adults participating in literacy programmes. This information is key to evaluating the quality of programmes and to informing policy decisions and mobilizing funds. The project is also aimed at

strengthening national capacities and improving South-South cooperation with an emphasis on national ownership and sustainability. In 2016, the project entered a new phase by expanding from an initial 5 to 12 countries in Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the Congo, Mali, Morocco, the Niger, Senegal and Togo. The second phase of the project covers a period of four years (2016–2020) and comprises various implementation phases. National teams were established and now include more than 120 specialists from ministries, universities and statistical bureaux, as well as consultants. A ministerial information meeting in November 2017 confirmed the high level of political will to implement the monitoring and evaluation of literacy programmes as part of national evaluation systems. To date, the second-phase results include the development and validation of harmonized competency and assessment frameworks at the subregional level, with plans to pilot the assessment surveys in 2019.

34. UNESCO also provides training for national teams of statisticians to improve national monitoring data and information systems for the commitments of Sustainable Development Goal 4 and national education priorities. In the context of capacity development, UNESCO promotes the development of national indicators, frameworks, corresponding data sources and a quality assessment tool for each of the sources. Key achievements include the development of a set of global training tools that is being rolled out in selected countries through the implementation of the UNESCO Capacity Development for Education programme.

35. At the national level, UNESCO continued to strengthen capacities to improve and manage the non-formal education management and information system in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Chad, Haiti, Iraq, Mauritania, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan and Suriname. In Pakistan, UNESCO and other partners facilitated capacities to improve the non-formal education management and information system to promote the effective monitoring and evaluation of literacy interventions in the country. In Nepal, UNESCO supported the Ministry of Education in enhancing capacities at the central and local levels for the monitoring and evaluation of literacy. UNESCO also provided technical advice on improving existing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for literacy in Mali, Morocco, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and South Sudan. Since 2017, UNESCO has helped the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan to pilot a Global Positioning System-based monitoring system with real-time data.

E. Furthering research and knowledge creation and advocacy for youth and adult literacy at the global, regional and national levels

36. In its capacity as a clearinghouse for literacy, UNESCO collects, analyses and disseminates information and knowledge on promising practices in the field of literacy. In addition, the Organization undertakes policy-oriented research and collaborates with other specialized research institutions and networks, including the UNESCO chairs in literacy.

37. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning has the most comprehensive collection in the area of youth and adult literacy worldwide. Its strength lies in its historic dimension, international orientation and the wealth of specialized literacy curriculum materials. The Adult Learning Documentation and Information Network, coordinated by UNESCO, connects 106 documentation and information centres from all regions of the world. A UNESCO policy brief on how libraries can support national literacy efforts was produced in consultation with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, the Beyond Access project of the International Research and Exchanges Board and representatives of national and community libraries.

38. The capacity-building work of UNESCO with national institutions and partners in the design and implementation of effective literacy and numeracy programmes depends on its rich knowledge base. Between 2009 and 2018, the UNESCO Effective Literacy and Numeracy Practices Database made available 230 case studies on promising programmes that embed literacy and numeracy teaching and learning in their curricula. Since it was made available online, this database has been accessed by around 200,000 users per year. To ensure greater access to and use of the database worldwide, case studies are now available online in English, French and Spanish. Additionally, the Institute for Lifelong Learning has begun translating the case studies into the other official languages of UNESCO. In future, UNESCO plans to collaborate with regional institutions and national partners to translate and disseminate case studies. Thematic compilations drawing on the database have been proved to be another effective way of sharing good practices in more targeted ways to support advocacy and capacity-development interventions on specific themes. Since 2016, two compilations have been published, *Literacy in Multilingual and Multicultural Contexts: Effective Approaches to Adult Learning and Education* and *Fostering a Culture of Reading and Writing: Examples of Dynamic Literate Environments*.

39. UNESCO has continued advocating for literacy through global consultations and events, major initiatives and cross-sectoral partnerships to raise the profile of literacy on national and global agendas. The annual celebrations of International Literacy Day on 8 September, together with those of other international days, have been major opportunities for advocacy. In 2016, the fiftieth anniversary of International Literacy Day was celebrated with policy dialogues around the world. At the global level, a global meeting on the theme “Reading the past, writing the future” was organized in Paris on 8 and 9 September. To mark the occasion, UNESCO produced a publication entitled *Reading the Past, Writing the Future: Fifty Years of Promoting Literacy*. The publication describes the significance of this period of history and charts the evolution of understandings of literacy, the positive measures taken and actual progress in terms of literacy skills and their impacts on people’s lives. It also illustrates the remaining challenges and the troubling fact that, because of population growth, the number of non-literate adults is actually higher now than it was 50 years ago, even though the global literacy rate has increased.

40. As mentioned above, International Literacy Day in 2017 focused on the theme “Literacy in a digital world”. International Literacy Day in 2018 will revisit integrated approaches that connect literacy and the skills required for work under the theme “Literacy and skills development”, and will explore effective responses in terms of policies and practices to evolving skills requirements in our increasingly digitalized and globalized world. The UNESCO International Literacy Prizes programme continued to provide awards and recognition annually to five outstanding literacy practices on International Literacy Day, with the support of China and the Republic of Korea. These Prizes support the clearinghouse function of UNESCO and contribute to enhancing a global knowledge base on effective practices, which includes the Effective Literacy and Numeracy Practices Database. Other important events, such as International Mother Language Day, UNESCO Mobile Learning Week and World Teachers’ Day, also continue to be key instruments in promoting literacy and literate environments worldwide.

41. The Director General of UNESCO officially launched the Global Alliance for Literacy within the Framework of Lifelong Learning on 8 September 2016 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of International Literacy Day. The Alliance was established in response to General Assembly resolutions [68/132](#), [69/141](#) and [71/166](#). The Alliance is a multi-stakeholder partnership for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4, in particular target 4.6, and focuses on the areas of advocacy,

policy and knowledge-sharing and digital resources, including open educational resources.

42. In some countries, UNESCO collaborates with other partners to promote non-formal and literacy education for youth and adults. In Pakistan, as part of the non-formal education subgroup under the National Education Development Partners Group, UNESCO contributes to the coordination and dissemination of research, knowledge products and advocacy materials for non-formal and literacy education. A national forum was co-organized by UNESCO to promote literacy and define the way forward to improve literacy in the country.

43. As a lead United Nations agency, UNESCO is currently preparing for the International Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019. UNESCO has consulted a range of stakeholders and other agencies to develop an action plan for organizing this event.

F. Learning cities to promote inclusive and equitable societies

44. To address the many complex changes in the world today, UNESCO established the Global Network of Learning Cities to support cities in developing holistic and integrated approaches to lifelong learning, recognizing the needs of all learners. The Network promotes policy dialogue and peer learning among members, fosters partnership, provides capacity-building and develops instruments to encourage and recognize progress in building learning cities. Local governments, being the closest level of government to people, are well placed to link the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to local communities and are particularly encouraged to make cities and human settlements more sustainable.

45. The mission of the Network has become all the more pertinent as a growing number of cities have identified lifelong learning as a key to tackling challenges relating to their social cohesion, economic development and sustainability. In order to achieve fairer and more inclusive societies, learning opportunities need to be provided for people of all ages and at all education levels, in particular for marginalized and vulnerable groups. This includes the promotion of literacy and numeracy skills through formal, non-formal and informal delivery mechanisms.

46. The city of Giza, Egypt, which received a UNESCO Learning City Award in 2017, provides an example of how cities can promote literacy through community engagement. Giza launched a comprehensive literacy initiative through which citizens who take literacy classes and receive literacy certificates are entitled to receive free health care and to participate in further education. To support the initiative, the city worked with universities to implement a programme encouraging students to take part in efforts to promote literacy. Students volunteering to help other community members to acquire reading and writing skills are compensated for their contribution. For example, once students have assisted a minimum of five people, they receive a financial incentive or a free training course. Compensatory packages of this kind help to foster community learning and intergenerational exchange.

IV. Education for democracy

47. The present section explores the implementation of resolution [71/8](#) on education for democracy. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development clearly identifies the connections between democratic governance, peace, sustainable development, the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals underlines that all learners should acquire knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development, including through the promotion of a culture of

peace and global citizenship. Education for democracy is vital to nurture responsible and active learners, capable of contributing effectively to peace and prosperity in their societies and beyond.

48. The challenges regarding the implementation of education for democracy outlined in the report of the Secretary-General entitled “Literacy for life: shaping future agendas and education for democracy” (A/71/177) continue to exist, including the lack of universally agreed definitions, overlap with other programmes such as human rights education and the sensitivity of such issues.

49. To address these challenges, new approaches are needed to foster the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are important for learners to participate in shaping positive social change. These include cognitive, socioemotional and behavioural capacities. Action is required across the board in formal, non-formal and informal education and through lifelong learning.

50. Education for democracy has been implemented in national education systems across the world under different headings and through different topics, including education on citizenship, civics, human rights, peace and intercultural dialogue. In support of Member States, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes have supported the development of relevant educational programmes.

51. The scope of activities that can be referred to as education for democracy is vast. It includes actions taken by United Nations agencies and programmes to promote education for democracy in a range of education settings.

52. The work of UNESCO on education for democracy is carried out within the framework of its global citizenship education programme, which takes into account local contexts, as well as concepts that convey the aspirations of global citizenship education in national practices, while fully respecting human rights. UNESCO is engaged in global and regional advocacy and capacity-building initiatives, as well as the provision of guidance for policymakers, teachers and curriculum and textbook developers. This includes promoting youth engagement as well as media and information literacy to prepare citizens to participate in political and social life and to prevent intolerance.

53. Building on its multisectoral mandate, UNESCO promotes education for democracy through the development of knowledge and educational approaches that foster respect for human rights and intercultural dialogue, with an emphasis on countering racism and discrimination and preventing violent extremism. UNESCO has established regional global citizenship education networks in Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa and among Arab Member States. This work is supported by the category 1 UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development and the category 2 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding. The UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network is a key mechanism for embedding democratic principles in classrooms, school governance, student participation and project management.

54. The United Nations Democracy Fund supports civil society organizations that empower youth, women and marginalized groups to analyse information, develop leadership skills and participate in decision-making. The Fund supports projects that develop democracy and human rights education and contribute to reducing educational inequalities around the world. Since 2016, it has promoted education for democracy through projects on education about human rights and civic participation for rural populations, particularly youth and illiterate women, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya. In Colombia, a project financed by the Fund is advocating for education to become a national priority as a fundamental element in addressing inequality.

55. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supports 60 countries in electoral processes to enhance understanding of such processes, broaden the engagement of all stakeholders, enhance civic engagement and advance transparency. Targeted campaigns enhance the participation of vulnerable or marginalized groups, including women, youth and people with disabilities. UNDP also supports training for national and international observers, the media and political parties, as well as voter education. Building on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and recognition of the role of education in advancing human rights and global citizenship, UNDP supports 70 national parliaments in engaging in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

56. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) contributes to increasing awareness of human rights standards and their protection through education, public information and capacity-building. It fosters participation in decision-making and the rule of law within democratic systems. Human rights education is a feature of the work of OHCHR and its field presences. The Office coordinates the World Programme for Human Rights Education that encourages national human rights education programming. It supports human rights education programmes by providing advice and developing and disseminating training and educational materials and other public access resources.

57. The approach of UNICEF to education for democracy focuses on learning and skills, including skills for empowerment and active citizenship from early childhood to secondary education and skills training. In 2017, UNICEF launched the Life Skills and Citizenship Education initiative in the Middle East and North Africa region with Governments and regional partners. UNICEF supports the integration of peace and social cohesion education in national education systems. Through the Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy programme, UNICEF has reviewed the contribution of education to peace in Liberia, Myanmar, Pakistan, South Africa and Uganda, underlining the roles of education ministries in strengthening inclusion.

58. These examples highlight the range of activities to promote education for democracy undertaken around the world, which are vital to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

V. Recommendations on future action on literacy for life and education for democracy

59. **Based on the present report, the General Assembly may wish to consider:**

Literacy for life

(a) **Recognizing literacy as a right, as a foundation for lifelong learning and as a continuum of different proficiency levels;**

(b) **Inviting Governments to formulate legal frameworks and policies aimed at building learning pathways and offering learning opportunities for all throughout life, especially for the most marginalized and excluded members of society;**

(c) **Encouraging Governments and partners to work towards intersectoral approaches to literacy, including integrating literacy in vocational training, health education and active citizenship for sustainable development, and to seek innovative solutions to improve quality and expand access to such programmes;**

(d) **Calling upon Governments, development partners, specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system, civil society and**

the private sector to accelerate and enhance efforts to make youth and adult literacy a priority, to scale up literacy provision for children, youth and adults, with particular attention to those who are vulnerable and marginalized and to women and girls, and to mobilize sufficient, effective and sustainable funding to achieve this goal;

(e) Urging international development partners and Governments to ensure that funds mobilized by and channelled through existing international financing mechanisms for education, including the Global Partnership for Education, Education Cannot Wait and the International Financing Facility for Education, also explicitly target and benefit youth and adult literacy;

(f) Requesting UNESCO to continue to play a coordinating and catalysing role in the implementation of target 4.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals and to continue to support Member States, in collaboration with partners, in the areas of policy formulation and planning, programme design and implementation, assessment, and monitoring and evaluation, as well as generating and sharing knowledge and information;

(g) Requesting the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the Director General of UNESCO, to submit to the Assembly at its seventy-seventh session a report on the present recommendations;

Education for democracy

(h) Furthering efforts to bolster through education the connections between democratic governance, peace, sustainable development and the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms.