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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development****Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education:  
realizing the right to education through non-formal  
education\*****Note by the Secretariat**

The Secretariat has the honour to transmit to the Human Rights Council the report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, prepared pursuant to Council resolutions 8/4 and 26/17.

The right to education should be guaranteed throughout the lifespan — from early childhood until adulthood and into old age. Yet, there are an estimated 263 million children and youth not in school today. Some 775 million adults worldwide are illiterate, two thirds of them women. The commitments made in the Sustainable Development Goals and in the Incheon Declaration: Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all require education systems to reach more learners and to diversify the means of doing so.

The Special Rapporteur believes that non-formal education programmes provide flexible, learner-centred means to improve education outcomes. This is particularly relevant for girls and groups in vulnerable situations, including children with disabilities, minorities and rural and impoverished children, who are disproportionately represented among out-of-school populations. When designed to be available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable, such programmes enable States to fulfil the right to education of learners who are excluded from the formal system. Furthermore, such programmes can promote holistic learning objectives that support cultural and linguistic rights.

The Rapporteur calls upon States to recognize non-formal education as a flexible, cost-effective mechanism that can provide quality education and that can help States to meet their obligations in connection with the right to education.

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\* The present document was submitted late to reflect the most recent developments.

## **Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education: realizing the right to education through non-formal education**

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## I. Introduction

1. The present report was prepared pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 8/4 and 26/17. In it, the Special Rapporteur on the right to education examines how non-formal education has been used to progressively achieve the right to education, particularly for learners who are not able to access formal education systems.

2. The right to education gives every person the right to lifelong learning opportunities, from early childhood care and education to adult learning programmes. This right requires that Governments immediately provide free, universal quality primary education for all, while progressively providing it at all other levels without discrimination.

3. From 2000 to 2015, the Millennium Development Goals tracked the efforts of Governments to achieve universal primary education and gender parity in education, and significant progress was made worldwide. With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Incheon Declaration: Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all, Governments expanded the scope of their goal to include universal secondary education and the progressive introduction of lifelong learning opportunities.

4. Nevertheless, significant gaps remain. An estimated 61 million children of primary school age, 60 million children of lower secondary school age and 142 million children of upper secondary school age are out of the formal school system.<sup>1</sup> This deficit is particularly acute in sub-Saharan Africa, where 29.8 million children remain out of school, nearly half all out-of-school children worldwide. Some 775 million adults, two thirds of them women, lack minimum literacy skills. In sub-Saharan Africa, 42 per cent of students drop out before graduating primary school; in South and West Asia, that figure is 33 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Discrimination based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status make it difficult to reach populations in situations of vulnerability and social exclusion, and, often, flexible and innovative strategies are needed until formal, lifelong learning opportunities are available to everyone.

5. Despite recent commitments to provide universal, free, quality primary and lower secondary education for all, an estimated 15 million girls and 10 million boys may never receive any formal education at all.<sup>3</sup> Countries with large populations of out-of-school children must adopt non-formal education approaches, including “second chance” and accelerated learning programmes and adult literacy programmes, to protect the right to education of every person.

6. In the present report, the Special Rapporteur considers how non-formal education may offer practical pathways to address some of the challenges faced by States with learners who are not being served by the formal education system. She also considers situations in which non-formal programmes have been effective and highlights some examples. Finally, the Special Rapporteur offers recommendations on how non-formal education can be strengthened and used to support the realization of the right to education.

### A. Activities undertaken by the Special Rapporteur

7. During the reporting period, the Special Rapporteur submitted a report to the General Assembly (A/71/358), which addressed lifelong learning and the right to education.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), “Leaving no one behind: how far on the way to universal primary and secondary education?”, Policy Paper No. 27/ Factsheet No. 37 (Paris, July 2016).

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *Global Education Digest 2012: Opportunities Lost — The Impact of Repetition and Early School Leaving* (Paris, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), *Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All: Findings from the Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children* (Montreal, 2015).

8. From 5 to 7 September 2016, the Special Rapporteur attended the East Africa regional consultation on developing human rights-based guiding principles on State obligations regarding private schools, which was hosted by the Open Society Foundations Education Support Program, the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Right to Education Project. States, civil society representatives, human rights organizations and experts participated in the development of human rights guiding principles on State obligations with regard to the provision of education, including private schools.

9. On 11 November 2016, the Special Rapporteur participated in an international seminar held in the framework of the ninth general assembly of the Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education, in Mexico City. The seminar addressed the role of human rights and the promotion of the right to education in Latin America.

10. From 16 to 18 November 2016, the Special Rapporteur attended the inaugural international seminar of the South-South Cooperation Programme with Lusophone Countries, held in Porto, Portugal, and hosted by the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) office in Brazil and the Open Society Foundation. At the seminar, the UNESCO *Third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* in Portuguese was launched and civil society representatives of Portuguese-speaking countries came together to address issues related to the right to education in their countries.

11. From 17 to 19 January 2017, the Special Rapporteur attended the International Symposium on School Violence and Bullying: from Evidence to Action, co-organized by UNESCO and the Institute of School Violence Prevention at Ewha Women's University in Seoul. At the symposium, international experts, representatives of education ministries and of international and civil society organizations gathered to urge education policymakers to take evidence-based action with a view to offering safe and non-violent learning environments.

12. On 13 and 14 March 2017, the Special Rapporteur attended the Europe and North America regional consultation on developing the human rights-based guiding principles on State obligations regarding private schools, hosted by the Open Society Foundations Education Support Program, the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Right to Education Project. States, civil society representatives, human rights organizations and experts participated in the development of human rights guiding principles on State obligations with regard to the provision of education, including private schools.

13. From 4 to 6 April 2017, the Special Rapporteur attended an event in São Paulo, Brazil, for the release of *Strategic Litigation Impacts: Equal Access to Quality Education*, a comparative study of the situation in Brazil, India and South Africa prepared by the Open Society Foundations Education Support Program. The study is part of a series reviewing the impact of strategic litigation on strengthening the right to education in 11 countries.

## II. Defining non-formal education

14. The distinction between informal, non-formal and formal education is a fluid one. Formal education is traditionally seen as the State-run system, organized and delivered by Governments, certified and recognized as official. Non-formal education is typically in contrast with that definition, and encompasses any institutionalized, organized learning that is outside of the formal system.

15. Non-formal education takes place both within and outside educational institutions and caters to people of all ages. It does not always lead to certification. Non-formal education programmes are characterized by their variety, flexibility and ability to respond quickly to new educational needs of children or adults. They are often designed for specific groups of learners such as those who are too old for their grade level, those who do not attend formal school and adults. Curricula may be based on formal education or on new approaches. Examples include accelerated "catch-up" learning, after-school programmes

and literacy- and numeracy-focused programmes. Non-formal education may lead to late entry into formal education programmes, in which case it is sometimes called “second chance” education.

16. The main difference between formal and non-formal education is that the latter exists primarily thanks to partnerships with local communities and civil society or other actors, providing flexibility in content and delivery modalities to meet the local requirements of learners, in circumstances where the formal education system is not yet able to do so. While this type education is delivered outside of the formal system, learners should still have the opportunity to learn to the same national standards and to qualify to enter the formal system at some point, or to receive qualifications equivalent to formal primary- or secondary-school leaving certificates.

17. Within the lifelong learning paradigm, learners should be able to begin with informal learning in the home, enter a non-formal early childhood programme, pursue formal primary and secondary education and enter a non-formal adult learning programme in their thirties, and then obtain a university qualification in their fifties. The traditional paradigm of education, which is tied to specific age categories and is delivered only in government-certified schools, must be flexible enough to serve the needs of the millions of out-of-school children and adult learners, without undermining the minimum quality standards set by the State.

### **III. Legal and normative framework**

#### **A. International legal instruments**

18. The right to education, established in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), provides for a humanistic vision of right to free, compulsory primary education for all. The role of non-formal education has also been recognized. The Committee on the Rights of the Child interprets that right as related to both formal and non-formal education,<sup>4</sup> as does the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>5</sup> when interpreting article 13 of the Covenant.

19. The right to education has recently been reaffirmed with the adoption of the political commitments contained in the Sustainable Development Goals and the Incheon Declaration and framework for action. Sustainable Development Goal 4 calls upon States to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.<sup>6</sup> In addition to guaranteeing universal, free, quality primary education for all, the right has been extended in target 4.1 to providing secondary education as well. In the Incheon Declaration, Governments committed themselves to promoting quality lifelong learning opportunities for all, in all settings and at all levels of education, including equitable and increased access to quality technical and vocational education and training and higher education and research, with due attention to quality assurance. In addition, Governments highlighted the provision of flexible learning pathways, as well as the recognition, validation and accreditation of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education.

20. The first Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Katarina Tomasevski, created a framework based on what she termed “the four As” to guide legislators, policymakers and educators on the implementation of the right to education. The framework holds that education must be available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable. Education that is free,

<sup>4</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Children, general comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration, para. 79.

<sup>5</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 13 (1999) on the right to education, para. 4.

<sup>6</sup> General Assembly resolution 70/1.

with adequate infrastructure and trained teachers is available. To be accessible, education must be non-discriminatory and open to everyone, with positive measures to include marginalized students. The content of education must be relevant, non-discriminatory, culturally appropriate and of good quality in order to be acceptable. Finally, education is adaptable when it evolves with the changing needs of society, contributes to challenging inequalities and can be continually adapted locally to suit specific context. That standard was endorsed by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its general comment No. 13 (1999) on the right to education.

21. The responsibility for implementing the right to education lies first and foremost with the State. States must respect, protect and fulfil that right. Respect requires States to avoid measures that hinder or prevent the enjoyment of the right to education. To protect the right is to ensure that third parties do not interfere with right to education (usually through regulation and legal guarantees). The obligation to fulfil means taking positive measures that enable and assist individuals and communities to enjoy the right to education and to provide appropriate measures towards the full realization of the right to education. Non-formal education approaches that are consistent with these obligations should be recognized as important means by which States can realize their obligations under the right to education.

## **B. National legal frameworks**

22. The non-formal education sector should be integrated into national education laws, policies and plans. Following the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, national education laws should provide for a lifelong learning model that includes a formal system of early childhood care and education, primary and secondary school, tertiary and vocational systems, as well as informal learning and non-formal schooling, including adult literacy programmes. States should establish a regulatory and policy framework for providers of non-formal education, including a mechanism to recognize, validate and accredit learning, regardless of its source, and introduce a mechanism by which learners can enter and exit the formal system, thereby obtaining qualifications that are connected to the formal system. The right to education of learners should be codified and made enforceable through judicial and quasi-judicial mechanisms and adequate funding mechanisms should be identified (see A/HRC/23/35 and A/66/269).

23. Existing legal frameworks, however, tend to only partially address non-formal education. In a review by UNESCO of 40 national education plans, only 11 mentioned training teachers of non-formal education.<sup>7</sup> In Mongolia, the education law reflected a major policy shift towards integrating non-formal education into the broader national education system and securing a part of the education budget for non-formal education.<sup>8</sup> In Burkina Faso, the Education Act of 1996 contributed to raising the profile of non-formal education and brought about closer cooperation between the formal and non-formal sectors.<sup>9</sup>

24. Non-formal education strategies should be focused on creating space in which partners can operate while defining the roles of both Government and educators. One example is the strategy of partnering with civil society to implement education objectives that was first adopted in Senegal.<sup>10</sup> The strategy clarifies State and civil society obligations,

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<sup>7</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/4: Teaching and Learning — Achieving Quality for All* (Paris, 2014), p. 218.

<sup>8</sup> Mari Yasunaga, “Non-formal education as a means to meet learning needs of out-of-school children and adolescents” (Montreal, 2014), p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Wim Hoppers, “Meeting the learning needs of all young people and adults: an exploration of successful policies and strategies in non-formal education”, background paper prepared for *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008: Education for All by 2015 — Will We Make It?* (Paris, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Association for the Development of Education in Africa. “More and better education”, *ADEA Newsletter*, vol. 18, No. 1 (Libreville, 2006).

roles and tasks, emphasizes learners' and local-level management and accountability for programmes and has given new impetus and visibility to adult literacy. The State organizes and regulates the non-formal education sector, engaging with civil society education providers and learners to create specific programmes that respond to local requirements. The strategy includes setting up official coordinating mechanisms between Governments and civil society partners, including coordinated planning systems. Data systems measure demand and student performance and links are established with vocational schools and literacy programmes.

### **C. Rights-based, holistic education**

25. Education plays both a utilitarian economic role and a humanistic, social role. While literacy and numeracy skills address the first two pillars of learning, learning to know and learning to do, a holistic view of education adds learning to be and learning to live together.<sup>11</sup> By addressing gaps in education delivery for groups in situations of vulnerability and conflict and in order to address inequality in accessing the basic right to education, non-formal education necessarily addresses elements beyond economic development.

26. The signatories to the Incheon Declaration called for the adoption of a rights-based and humanistic approach based on the principles of human rights and dignity, social justice, peace, inclusion and protection and reflecting the cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity of people.<sup>12</sup> Depending on their design, non-formal education programmes can be particularly helpful for the protection of local cultures and languages, as well as minority religions and traditional knowledge. However, more limited programmes may seek to provide only literacy or employable skills. It is the responsibility of States and funding partners to ensure that programmes meet the individual and social needs of learners, and that they do so in a holistic fashion.

### **D. Bridge to the formal system**

27. Non-formal education programmes can play a crucial role in providing “second chance” education to out-of-school children and expanding educational opportunities to areas beyond the reach of the mainstream public school system. However, it is important that such educational opportunities provide a recognized pathway into the formal system. Equivalency programmes have been developed in countries with large out-of-school populations, such as Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali and Zambia, as well as countries in South and South-East Asia, to bridge formal and non-formal education systems by linking curricula and developing frameworks to recognize the outcomes of prior learning.<sup>13</sup> These programmes function through recognition, validation and accreditation mechanisms.

### **E. Recognition, validation and accreditation**

28. Within the context of lifelong learning, it is necessary to be able to recognize, validate and accredit learning, wherever it may have occurred. Recognition is the process of giving official status to skills or learning outcomes through qualifications, equivalencies, credits or other certifications. Validation involves ensuring that the learner has actually achieved certain competencies, which can then be publicly accredited. This can be done by Governments or by recognized independent authorities. Through the recognition, validation and accreditation process the learner gains access to further education or employment opportunities.

<sup>11</sup> Sobhi Tawil and Marie Cougoureux, “Revisiting *Learning: the Treasure Within* — assessing the influence of the 1996 Delors report”, occasional paper No. 4, January 2013.

<sup>12</sup> See <https://en.unesco.org/world-education-forum-2015/incheon-declaration>.

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNICEF, *Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All*, p. 41.

29. Recognition, validation and accreditation processes must be supported by national political will, in the form of education policies and laws. Stable support by politicians is necessary to allow for the long-term investment needed to make sure that there are local education delivery partners. The national interest in education is a second relevant consideration. Purely utilitarian policies will focus on learner employability and may be reduced to a skills-based qualification framework. A holistic view of education will consider the wider range of skills needed to participate fully in society, including interpersonal, conflict resolution, health and life skills, an understanding of local culture and history, and knowledge about environmental and sustainable development issues. The final consideration is the interests of stakeholders and institutions, who must be open to recognizing qualifications obtained by others or taught by trained facilitators with alternative qualifications. By establishing objective criteria, the above-mentioned considerations can be properly addressed.

30. Policy frameworks for recognizing, validating and accrediting non-formal education programmes are crucial for managing the relationship between formal and informal education providers, as well as that between vocational and other secondary or tertiary educational institutions. However, with the development of integrated educational systems based on lifelong learning, there is a greater need for a recognition, validation and accreditation framework for primary and secondary education, particularly for countries with many out-of-school children or a high number of illiterate adults.

31. The methodology for recognizing, validating and accrediting prior learning varies widely. South Africa has developed a portfolio-building system through community learning centres, supported by volunteers.<sup>14</sup> Benin, Mali and Senegal validate competencies based on dual apprenticeship schemes that combine literacy with vocational training. In Indonesia, alternative educational pathways are offered in the form of formal, non-formal and informal tracks.<sup>15</sup> At the regional level, the European inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning seeks to provide a regional framework to facilitate the recognition by all European countries of learners' skills and qualifications.

## F. National education qualification frameworks

32. National education qualification frameworks are required for the development, classification and recognition of skills, knowledge and competencies along a continuum of agreed levels.<sup>16</sup> Such frameworks should be established to set educational standards, allowing every learner to know what achievements are required for each level of education from early childhood until upper secondary school. Non-formal programmes can thus be developed to meet the diverse needs of learners outside of the formal system and to establish mechanisms for learners to move between systems. Moreover, national education qualification frameworks should be established in connection with skills-based national qualification frameworks that provide entry into technical and vocational education and training programmes, as well as the workforce.

33. For example, in Burkina Faso, a non-formal programme with a four-year cycle has been developed and implemented by the associations Manegdzanga and Wuro Yiré.<sup>17</sup> By developing a curriculum based on the formal system and using a skills-based approach that lets learners advance at their own speed, learners following the programme took the same primary school leaving certificate exam as formal school students and exceeded the

<sup>14</sup> See [www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/promoting\\_lifelong\\_learning\\_through\\_the\\_recognition\\_of\\_the\\_o](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/promoting_lifelong_learning_through_the_recognition_of_the_o).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ron Tuck, *An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks: Conceptual and Practical Issues for Policy Makers* (ILO, Geneva, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Association for the Development of Education in Africa, *Strategic Orientation Framework for Non-Formal Education in a Holistic, Integrated and Diversified Vision of Lifelong Education* (Ouagadougou, 2012).

national average in both cases. In addition, the programme addressed basic life skills, made use of bilingual teaching and showed improved governance through greater community involvement.

#### **IV. Implementing non-formal education to realize the right to education**

34. Non-formal programmes provide relevant, flexible education opportunities to meet particular demands. They can also be used to fill gaps in the formal education system. In the present section, the Special Rapporteur considers examples of non-formal education programmes to illustrate their ability to address the gaps and challenges faced in education.

##### **Community schools**

35. The most common form of non-formal education, community schools are created by communities that lack a State-provided school. Adequate schooling is often unavailable in remote or sparsely populated areas, in slums and in other impoverished communities. As an interim step until the State is able to provide formal schools to all learners, communities may self-organize and finance schools, often in collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or other partners. Community schools have often been found to be more relevant to local needs, adaptable, cost-effective and student-centric than government schools.<sup>18</sup> Many provide schooling to countries underserved by the Government, such as Ghana, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.<sup>19</sup>

36. In order to accelerate the provision of education to impoverished areas, Governments may formalize their support to non-formal education programmes. Ghana, India and Bangladesh have longstanding, well-developed national plans and policies in support of non-formal education. In Ghana, the Complementary Basic Education policy promotes flexible non-formal education programmes for out-of-school children aged 8 to 14 years.<sup>20</sup> India is working to integrate non-formal and formal education plans into a single approach.<sup>21</sup> In Bangladesh, the success achieved by NGOs providing multiple non-formal education programmes led to the development, in 2010, of a policy action plan and a national framework for the implementation of such an approach that encompasses equivalence education, effective non-formal education delivery, standard and capacity development for non-formal education facilitators, and enhancement of the legal framework through a non-formal education act and monitoring mechanism. Nepal has formulated a non-formal education policy outlining objectives to provide alternative basic and vocational education to school dropouts.<sup>22</sup>

##### **Adult education and literacy**

37. With over 775 million illiterate adults worldwide, specific measures are required to target not just literacy and skills qualifications. Many adults who were unable to attend school as children require mechanisms that will help them learn to read and write and to obtain primary and secondary school qualifications. Often, however, illiterate adults are among the most vulnerable people in society and are unable to afford full-time education.

38. The Sustainable Development Goals commit societies to equitable skills development for adults who are beyond the age of formal schooling. Non-formal education

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<sup>18</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015: Education for All 2000-2015 — Achievements and Challenges* (Paris, 2015), p. 94.

<sup>19</sup> Yasunaga, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2012: Youth and Skills — Putting Education to Work* (Paris, 2012).

programmes that can provide flexible schedules for working learners are vital for reaching many adults who also have responsibilities to their families and employers. Legal protections must be put in place to make sure that employers make it easy for their employees to realize their right to education. Such measures might include flexible working schedules or unpaid time off work to allow employees to attend training or education programmes.

### **Inclusive education**

39. Children with disabilities face many forms of discrimination precisely because of their disabilities.

40. Accessing education is a problem for those with physical disabilities. In sparsely populated areas, there are often too few children with disabilities to justify specially trained teachers or inclusive education programmes. Different forms of disabilities have differing needs. Non-formal education can respond to these learning needs through its flexible and context-specific provision, whether by providing physical accommodations or by providing specially trained instructors to allow for inclusive education in formal or informal settings. Flexible learning programmes allow children who need to stay in hospital for long periods of time to continue their studies at a distance. However, challenges remain in the form of undertrained teachers or facilitators, insufficient social protection for families with disabled children and social perceptions of disability that lead to many children being teased and bullied at school.

41. In Bangladesh, the Building Resources Across Communities programme for children with special needs provides educational opportunities for children with disabilities, combined with specific government-supported interventions and equipment such as physical therapy, hearing aids, ramps to school buildings, wheelchairs, crutches, glasses and surgery, which were otherwise unaffordable to many.<sup>23</sup>

42. The Bureau of Special Education Administration of Thailand provides education and services for children with disabilities and disadvantaged children. In collaboration with local governments, there are 77 special education centres, 46 special needs education schools, 23,877 inclusive programmes with 383,196 students, 51 schools educating disadvantaged children and 42 hospital-based programmes. The Mae Hong Son Model is a multi-stakeholder model of collaboration that improves local government information-sharing and collaboration to allow school-age children with special needs to receive an education. This local collaboration is better able to address challenges related to negative attitudes and misinformation received by children with disabilities.<sup>24</sup>

### **Educating girls and women**

43. Girls are disproportionately represented among out-of-school children and women are disproportionately represented among illiterate adults. Whether they are withheld from school for cultural or religious reasons, because of early marriage or pregnancy, or on economic grounds when education is not free, special programmes are needed to address the exclusion of women and girls from education.

44. In Gambia, the Re-entry Programme for Girls initiated by the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education is a school for dropouts that focuses on providing guidance and counselling services.<sup>25</sup> In India, the Pehchan project of the Centre for Unfolding Learning Potentials is a “catch-up” programme that offers two-to-three-year courses at the primary level to rural adolescent girls. The Hope for Teenage Mothers organization in Kenya gives teenage mothers access to economic and educational opportunities through formal

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<sup>23</sup> Yasunaga, p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> UNESCO, *Asia Education Summit on Flexible Learning Strategies for Out-of-School Children* (Paris, 2014), p. 46.

<sup>25</sup> UNESCO, *From Access to Equality: Empowering Girls and Women through Literacy and Secondary Education* (Paris, 2012), p. 43.

education, vocational training and skills building.<sup>26</sup> The Flexible Response Fund of the Girls' Education Support Program, an initiative of the Agha Khan Foundation,<sup>27</sup> adopts flexible, participatory, multifaceted and inclusive approaches to addressing barriers to girls' education.

45. In recognition of the holistic nature of education, some non-formal education programmes go beyond literacy and numeracy. In Burkina Faso, the association Koom pour l'autopromotion des femmes au Burkina Faso has implemented a community-based programme focused on promoting literacy, training and peace.<sup>28</sup> Established in 1999, the association has 6,000 members belonging to 95 women's groups in six provinces. It works mainly with women and girls in rural areas, who receive introductory training in the national languages of Burkina Faso and are then taught in one of those languages, Mooré; additional sessions in simplified French are also provided. The programme also provides practical training in conflict resolution and addresses social issues at the village level, as well as teaching income-generating skills. It teaches life skills, including household management, health and hygiene, the importance of children going to school rather than doing domestic work, citizens' rights and responsibilities, the importance of living together in peace, and social and financial skills. The educational approach is based on the Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Technique. Participants resolve problems and commit to taking action under the guidance of a group leader or other individual. The curriculum is flexible and allows each community to identify its own conflict issues.

#### **Mother tongue instruction**

46. Students learn best when they are taught in their native language.<sup>29</sup> Despite this, in many States English, French or another "national" language is used as the medium of instruction. This can be particularly disadvantageous for members of ethnic minorities, who are at risk of losing their language, and for children from households that do not speak the language of instruction. Non-formal education programmes normally instruct in the language children use at home. This is further supported by the teaching of locally relevant topics, often including traditional knowledge and local values. Appropriate non-formal curricula, materials, pedagogies and the use of an appropriate language of instruction can help out-of-school children from minority groups to learn in safe and appropriate environments and prevent potential discrimination.<sup>30</sup>

47. In Ghana, the non-formal education programme "School for life" provides mother tongue language instruction to children in disadvantaged communities. It has helped over 120,000 children to date, 82 per cent of whom have made the transition to formal education.<sup>31</sup>

48. As a complement to formal education, non-formal programmes can also be designed to teach minority or other languages and cultures on weekends or after school. Such programmes help safeguard the cultural values of indigenous people and minorities. Particularly in rural regions and in indigenous cultures, traditional knowledge has been passed down through oral traditions. In many cultures, that local knowledge is being lost, as it is often not included in the national curriculum. Non-formal education programmes provided by local partners are well-placed to include and protect traditional knowledge in communities.

<sup>26</sup> See [www.educationinnovations.org/program/future-teenage-mothers](http://www.educationinnovations.org/program/future-teenage-mothers).

<sup>27</sup> See [www.akdn.org/file/31811/download?token=\\_Ynp0Sjr](http://www.akdn.org/file/31811/download?token=_Ynp0Sjr).

<sup>28</sup> See <http://litbase.uil.unesco.org/?menu=13&country=BF&programme=176>.

<sup>29</sup> Association for the Development of Education in Africa and others, "Policy guide on the integration of African languages and cultures into education systems" (2010).

<sup>30</sup> Yasunaga, p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNICEF, *Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All*, p. 72.

### Conflict situations

49. During times of conflict learners are often unable to attend school. In cases when reconstruction takes time, the delays can be significant. Children in conflict-affected countries account for just one fifth of the world's children of primary school age but one half of the world's out-of-school children.<sup>32</sup>

50. Schools in conflict areas are affected by multiple challenges. Some become temporary shelters for those fleeing conflict while others close due to damage or a lack of basic services. Retaining and recruiting teachers willing to stay becomes extremely difficult. The psychosocial impact of conflict on children creates new demands on educators. The damaging impact of conflict on education has been seen in many conflict-affected countries, including Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Mali, Nepal, the Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, the Sudan, Thailand and Zimbabwe, as well as the State of Palestine.<sup>33</sup>

51. Refugees and internally displaced persons are particularly affected, as they flee conflict and are often unable to return to their places of origin for extended periods of time. The right to education continues to apply during times of conflict and in emergency situations. The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies has promulgated minimum standards<sup>34</sup> for education based on international human rights law, among other sources.

52. Only 50 per cent of refugee children have access to primary education, compared with a global average of more than 90 per cent. As those children become older, the gap becomes a chasm: only 22 per cent of refugee adolescents attend secondary school compared with a global average of 84 per cent. At the higher education level, just 1 per cent of refugees attend university, compared with a global average of 34 per cent.

53. In the Syrian Arab Republic, enrolment in grades 1 to 12 fell by more than one third (35 per cent) between the 2011/2012 and 2012/13 academic years.<sup>35</sup> The Ministry of Education estimates that nearly one half of children have left the country and that the remainder are still in the country but have dropped out of school. Many children who have left the Syrian Arab Republic with their families are in Lebanon and at least 300,000 of them are out of school. The net enrolment rate among Syrian refugee children of primary and lower secondary school age (6-14 years old) is around 12 per cent — less than one half of the level in South Sudan. For children of upper secondary school age, probably less than 5 per cent are attending upper secondary education. Prior to the conflict in 2010, nearly all primary school age children were in school and nearly 90 per cent of lower secondary school age adolescents were enrolled. The situation is equally dire in nearby countries. Of the more than 4.8 million Syrian refugees registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, around 35 per cent are of school age. In Turkey, only 39 per cent of those children and adolescents were enrolled in primary and secondary education, 40 per cent in Lebanon and 70 per cent in Jordan. That means that nearly 900,000 Syrian school age refugee children and adolescents are not in school.<sup>36</sup>

54. Several NGOs and United Nations agencies in the Middle East and North Africa use non-formal education programmes as flexible measures to address the sudden rise in displaced out-of-school children. In Iraq and the Sudan, such programmes have been crucial for dealing with protracted crises in which large numbers of children have missed

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>34</sup> International Network for Education in Emergencies, *Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery*, 2nd ed. (2010).

<sup>35</sup> UNESCO, "A growing number of children and adolescents are out of school as aid fails to meet the mark", Policy Paper No. 22/Factsheet No. 31 (Paris, July 2015), p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Missing Out: Refugee Education in Crisis* (Geneva, 2016), p.11.

years of schooling. Accelerated learning programmes have been used in Iraq to help out-of-school children reintegrate into normal schools. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) expanded the number of students enrolled in such programmes from around 17,000 in the 2007/08 school year to more than 60,000 in 2010/11, in close collaboration with national authorities and local communities.<sup>37</sup>

55. The Norwegian Refugee Council's Youth Education Programme operates in 10 countries to provide displaced, returnee and other youth aged 14 years and older with a combination of literacy training and opportunities to gain practical skills that will increase their employability.<sup>38</sup> One barrier has been the lack of trained teachers and adequate funding. In the Sudan, the Government provides seconded teachers to the programme and pays their salaries even though few formal schools have excess capacity.

56. Afghanistan continues to face complex, overlapping challenges to achieving education for all. To address them, a number of flexible options are being offered, including: (a) community-based education and accelerated learning courses; (b) special community schools for nomadic populations; (c) early childcare and development; (d) literacy education; (e) special programmes for girls (for example, programmes that allow girls to learn how to teach Afghan); and (f) a circus for children.

57. It is crucial that national authorities and international organizations and partners include system-wide approaches in efforts to coordinate diverse providers in each phase of the conflict and ensure that action plans incorporate non-formal education in all areas.

#### **Natural disasters**

58. Natural disasters pose challenges that are similar to those faced by people in countries in conflict. Large-scale disasters result in millions of out-of-school children and adolescents and, in many cases, school reconstruction may take years. Non-formal education programmes are vital for providing rapid, flexible solutions.

59. In Bangladesh, Building Resources Across Communities has established a programme that makes "floating" schools available when a combination of floods and poverty make normal schooling impossible. In Indonesia, a "disaster service mobile class" is set up in areas affected by disaster. In addition to providing regular educational programmes, the service offers tents, wheelchairs, chairs or mats to sit on, books, white boards, radios, tape recorders and televisions, as well as psychological counselling and skills training.<sup>39</sup>

60. States should second teachers from damaged or destroyed schools to non-formal education providers and continue paying their salary. Disaster recovery plans should include such provisions and identify pre-qualified partners that can rapidly deploy temporary replacement schools. Such measures are vital for preventing children from spending months or years out of school.

#### **Children in rural areas**

61. Large portions of the world's out-of-school children and adolescents reside in rural areas, where they continue to face socioeconomic barriers. In sparsely populated areas, the cost of formal schools may not be justified or the quality of schools may be poor. The long distances that need to be covered to get to school and the costs associated with such travel mean that many parents to keep their children at home, where they work in agriculture. It might also be difficult to recruit teachers for small schools in remote regions.

62. Non-formal education can provide flexibility in the mode of delivery and provision of education, for example through multigrade classes, and flexible schedules that can accommodate local requirements. Specific curricula, in the local languages, can be developed to reflect local knowledge and culture.

<sup>37</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNICEF, *Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All*, p. 52.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>39</sup> Yasunaga, p. 18.

63. The Escuela Nueva model that originated in Colombia has been recognized for its success in meeting the learning needs of rural children.<sup>40</sup> In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, a non-formal "mobile teacher" programme was introduced to reach 6-14-year-old children living in isolated and remote areas without schools.<sup>41</sup> A total of 150 mobile teachers, 282 teaching assistants and 5,824 children, spread over 282 villages within 12 districts and three provinces, benefited from the programme.

### **Working children**

64. States are reminded that the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work calls for the effective abolition of child labour, as it harms the child's education, development and future livelihood. As States work towards eliminating child labour and regulating it in accordance with the relevant ILO conventions,<sup>42</sup> non-formal programmes can be used to accommodate working children.

65. Particularly when education is not available free of charge, children may be required to work to support their family, with younger children and girls more likely to stay behind. Economic difficulties also push many children do not enter or eventually to leave school to contribute to the family income, including by engaging in paid domestic work.

66. "Second chance" and non-formal learning opportunities are needed to promote social integration and reduce economic disparities. Such opportunities are critical to prevent large numbers of children from carrying a burden of disadvantage into adulthood and from being permanently harmed by their early work experiences.

67. Bangladesh has established learning centres through a project on promoting basic education for hard-to-reach working children in urban environments; the centres provide life skills-based, non-formal basic education for working children aged 10 to 14 years who have either never been to school or who have dropped out.<sup>43</sup> Accelerated learning programmes allow former working children to catch up on the education they did not receive and obtain an academic level that will allow them to enrol in formal schools or pursue vocational training opportunities.

### **Innovation and technology**

68. Many adult literacy and numeracy skills programmes include training in information and communications technologies, as basic computer and mobile telephone skills are increasingly needed for employment.

69. In Senegal, the National Education Programme for Illiterate Youth and Adults through Information and Communication Technologies has been implemented in 460 locations since 2013.<sup>44</sup> Operated with the support of the Ministry of Education and with four implementing partner organizations, the programme aims to promote economic development through basic education and skills training. While it is available to all, including children and the elderly, it focuses on women and girls. Funded 90 per cent by the national Government and 10 per cent by local authorities, the programme is able to adjust to local requirements.

<sup>40</sup> Rachel Kline, "A model for improving rural schools: Escuela Nueva in Colombia and Guatemala", *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, vol. 2, No. 2 (2002), pp. 170-181.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth St. George, "Overview of strategic issues in basic education" (Plan International, April 2015).

<sup>42</sup> For example, the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).

<sup>43</sup> UNICEF, "Basic education for urban working children: key statistics". Available from [https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/Education\\_for\\_Working\\_Children\\_\(BEHTRUWC\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/Education_for_Working_Children_(BEHTRUWC).pdf).

<sup>44</sup> See <http://litbase.uil.unesco.org/?menu=13&country=BF&programme=238>.

70. In Norway, the Programme for Basic Competence in Working Life<sup>45</sup> allows employers to provide literacy, numeracy and information and communications programmes to employees who wish to upgrade their skills. It provides funding for employers to create courses to teach their employees skills at the lower-secondary-school level. By partnering with employers to deliver the training, the Programme has been able to reach more people.

71. Innovations in pedagogy are often necessary to reach those who have been unsuccessful in formal systems. The Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Technique used in Burkina Faso and the Participatory Rural Appraisal approach used in Nepal replace the use of written texts by developing learning materials, together with learners, that reflect the local reality.<sup>46</sup> By creating maps of households, agriculture patterns and natural resources and by looking at rainfall, the gender dimension of workload, health and agriculture, daily activities can be integrated into curricula to promote literacy and numeracy. The pedagogy also explores relationships, conflict management and decision-making to promote citizenship and peace education.

## V. Financing non-formal education

72. In addition to getting limited political support, non-formal education often receives inadequate financial support. Particularly when national education budgets are already strained, insufficient attention is paid to the non-formal sector. In general, there is a lack of global statistics on non-formal education spending. Most reporting is partial and only reflects programme costs or spending in one area, such as adult literacy.

73. National education budgets must recognize the differential costs of reaching children based on their particular circumstances. The educational needs of children in rural areas, with disabilities and belonging to minorities may require additional resources, particularly to ensure that the quality of education provided meets national standards.

74. In Burkina Faso, the National Fund for Literacy and Non-formal Education represents a good practice for mobilizing and distributing resources. The Fund is an autonomous body with the status of a public institution. It sources funds from both the public and private sectors and engages in non-profit activities. The Fund aims to raise, increase, diversify and manage contributions from the State, individuals and partners in the private sector to finance non-formal education, including literacy programmes in the national languages and French and skills training programmes. While the Fund cannot at present finance programmes for 9-14-year-old children, it subsidizes capacity-building initiatives in the non-formal education sector and has adopted new modes for funding non-formal education for the poor.

75. There is growing awareness of the importance of funding non-formal programmes. In Indonesia, a presidential decree has set a minimum of 3 per cent of the annual education budget for community learning centres, where non-formal education is provided for young people.<sup>47</sup>

76. The Government of Uganda supports the expansion by NGOs of primary education for disadvantaged children in rural and urban areas, by directly training teachers and contributing to their salaries through the government payroll.<sup>48</sup> In 2010, Mongolia developed and piloted non-formal education pre-service training for teachers, including those involved in multigrade teaching. Thailand provides a supplementary e-training

<sup>45</sup> See <http://litbase.uil.unesco.org/?menu=13&country=BF&programme=126>.

<sup>46</sup> See [www.accu.or.jp/litdbase/literacy/nrc\\_nfe/eng\\_bul/BUL17.pdf](http://www.accu.or.jp/litdbase/literacy/nrc_nfe/eng_bul/BUL17.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> Yasunaga, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/4*, pp. 218-219.

programme for non-formal education teachers with six components, including action research, English and mathematics.<sup>49</sup>

77. Recognizing that properly implemented non-formal education programmes further the right to education and, in particular, that they can deliver quality education to out-of-school children and those most in need of education, donors, aid agencies, development banks and NGOs should engage with States to assist in the establishment of national funding mechanisms for non-formal education programmes. In consultation with international organizations, including UNESCO and UNICEF, donors can identify well-managed and effective programmes.

78. Partnerships with civil society and religious actors may exist in the formal and non-formal systems. However, the Special Rapporteur cautions that for-profit education providers often violate the tenets of the right to education. Low-fee private schools tend to violate the principle of free, universal education and often provide education that is of a lower quality than that provided by public schools. The previous Special Rapporteur has consistently warned of the inherent risks and challenges resulting from privatization, public private partnerships and the commercialization of education (see A/69/402, A/HRC/29/30 and A/70/342).

## VI. Evaluation and data collection

79. Effective data collection and evaluation is crucial to ensure that non-formal education programmes meet educational objectives while respecting the right to education. In order to be able to evaluate whether certain sectors of the population, for example girls and women or members of groups in vulnerable situations, are adequately included and how they are performing, the data collected must be detailed and disaggregated.

80. Despite this need, few systematic assessments have been carried out of these non-formal education alternatives for out-of-school learners. Complications arise when assessments are carried out by sponsors or donors, who may not be fully objective, and when educational data collection systems are limited, as is the case in many countries.

81. National education management information systems are being developed in many countries, making it easier to gather information on formal education systems. Such systems should be expanded to include the gathering of information on non-formal programmes, which is particularly important for identifying education learning outcomes, including for groups in vulnerable situations, which are disproportionately served by non-formal education programmes.

82. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning has established an assessment and monitoring programme to measure literacy known as “Action Research: Measuring Literacy Programme Participants’ Learning Outcomes”. The programme is based on a methodological framework that takes into account cultural, educational and linguistic specificities, as well as the knowledge and capacities of experts from the participating countries, in order to design, manage and implement programmes locally.<sup>50</sup>

83. In part because of the multiplicity of non-formal programmes, it is even more important for Governments to have independent, verifiable information for results-based spending. An evaluation of Ishraq, a “second chance” programme for adolescent girls in upper Egypt, showed how it outperformed other comparable systems. It provided literacy training for out-of-school girls aged 12 to 15 years, as well as a curriculum of life skills developed by NGOs. By 2008, the programme had succeeded in preparing most girls for the national Adult Education Agency exam (with an 81 per cent pass rate) and encouraging

<sup>49</sup> UNESCO and UNICEF, *Report on the Joint UNESCO and UNICEF Regional Workshop on Equivalency Programmes and Alternative Certified Learning: Achieving Education for All and Promoting Lifelong Learning* (Bangkok, 2011), p. 18.

<sup>50</sup> See <http://uil.unesco.org/literacy/measurement-of-learning-outcomes-ramaa>.

them to enter or re-enter formal schools. Ishraq graduates were also inclined to delay marriage until they were at least 18 years of age and to have smaller families.<sup>51</sup>

84. Data collection alone can measure learning outcomes, but holistic education goals require additional evaluations that must be budgeted for and regularly implemented. Such evaluations will also assist in identifying innovations that should be included in formal programmes. In a climate of scarce resources, these measures are vital for results-based management by national education departments.

## VII. Strengthening non-formal education

85. Despite the potential value of non-formal education programmes, not all succeed. There remains a widespread assumption among policymakers and educators that non-formal education is a second class system, which means that it is often neglected in efforts to improve the formal systems. It is vital that this perception be addressed, as effective, quality, non-formal programmes are not merely stop-gap measures to supplement formal education, but rather alternative measures that can better meet the needs of underserved learners.

86. Quality in education has the same indicators, regardless of the form of delivery. The four As of acceptability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability apply to all forms of education. Education must be free and open to all, teachers must be well trained and schools well built, and the curriculum must be relevant and non-discriminatory. These standards require investment and policy support from Governments, in collaboration with local delivery partners. Intragovernmental coordination between relevant ministries and close cooperation with municipal authorities is even more important owing to the multidimensional nature of programmes that simultaneously address poverty, health, education, employment and values related to citizenship and peace.

87. The movement towards integrated national education systems with closer collaboration between ministries is a welcome first step. However, equal attention must be given to developing the capacities of local authorities and non-State education providers. Improved salaries, professional development training, social esteem and working conditions are necessary to attract better-qualified teachers and to ensure that non-formal programmes are recognized as equally valued means of providing quality education. Data collection, oversight and monitoring systems can help address concerns related to learner and teacher performance and to identify programmes that should be expanded. Lessons learned from evaluations can identify innovations to be integrated into formal education systems.

88. Policymakers involved in addressing conflict and disaster situations should establish provisions for Governments to deploy teachers who have been displaced from their schools into non-formal programmes and establish an emergency action response plan. Prior coordination with non-formal education providers can ensure teachers are rapidly deployed to temporary programmes and, where possible, paid by the Government.

89. Academic interest in non-formal education pales in comparison to that given to formal systems. Millions of children, adults, refugees and others require access to quality programmes and Governments require evidence upon which to support their policies and financial support. Academic institutions and researchers must invest greater time and money into this underserved area to ensure States are better able to take decisions in respect of non-formal education programmes and policies.

## VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

90. **Non-formal education is an important and valuable method of providing the right to education for children, youths and adults who are unable to access the formal education system. While free, universal and lifelong education for all must remain the**

<sup>51</sup> UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2012*, p. 29.

ultimate objective of every State, non-formal education programmes represent important alternatives for ensuring that all learners are able to realize their right to education.

91. Non-formal education refers to flexible, creative mechanisms and programmes that focus on providing education and recognizable skills to learners. As the education system progressively moves towards a learner-centred model focused mainly on the education received rather than on the mode of delivery, greater attention is required from Governments to ensure that non-formal programmes are adequately funded, regulated and integrated into the national education framework.

92. In a manner that complements technical and vocational education and training, non-formal education programmes should create alternatives to bring out-of-school children into the formal system or provide new education options that promote employable skills, as well as a holistic education. Children who currently lack access to formal schools can be reached through cost-effective partnerships and innovative delivery modes. Dropouts and older children who lack basic education can receive assistance to catch up and return to school.

93. States must establish recognition, validation and accreditation mechanisms to ensure that the skills and knowledge obtained in non-formal programmes can be recognized and used to re-enter the formal education system or the job market. This should be closely connected to the national qualification frameworks, which evaluate and recognize job-related skills.

94. In addition, non-formal adult literacy programmes are vital means of reaching millions of illiterate adults. Basic education is the most fundamental of rights, as it enables the realization of all other rights. The right to education should not depend on a person's age. We must recognize more explicitly that this right should also be enjoyed by out-of-school children who are too old to re-join, either because they dropped out or because they started late. Individuals must not lose the right to access basic education after they turn 18 years of age.

95. In situations of conflict and natural disaster, there is an urgent need to quickly implement alternative education systems until schools are rebuilt and children can return to them. Policymakers must establish and design emergency response plans that provide for non-formal programmes to ensure education continues to be delivered, even when schools are no longer accessible. These temporary systems should supplement the rehabilitation of the formal system, but we must not allow a generation of children to be lost when conflicts continue or reconstruction is protracted for years.

96. Non-formal education programmes are effective in promoting equity and inclusion in education. By addressing out-of-school children and illiterate adults, these programmes can target the disproportionate number of persons with disabilities, women and girls, and persons belonging to groups in vulnerable situations who are not in formal education systems.

97. Stable and sufficient funding is a precondition to the development and promotion of quality civil society partners and non-formal education programmes. It is imperative that donors, international development banks and NGOs fund and support these programmes, which are vital for reaching individuals outside the formal system. Concerns related to quality and learning outcomes must be addressed as challenges and by strengthening the capacity of partners.

98. States must also recognize the willingness of civil society partners to promote the right to education in the most difficult of circumstances. Non-formal education programmes reach learners in geographically remote areas, as well as students with disabilities, from groups in vulnerable situations, and those in extreme poverty. Innovative programmes often inform the formal system and promote change, such as the inclusion of minority languages and culturally sensitive curricula. Successful innovations in pedagogical approaches are often identified through non-formal education programmes and incorporated into national systems. Experimentation with

information and communications technologies can identify cost-effective interventions that may also have applications in formal settings.

99. The direct partnerships among communities, civil society, parents and Governments common to most non-formal education programmes create new measures of accountability. This bottom-up approach empowers parents and communities to hold Governments accountable for improving standards, through annual forums and standardized consultation mechanisms. By building space for dialogue for all stakeholders, non-formal education programmes empower learners, parents and communities to express their requirements and oblige educators to be more responsive to local needs.

100. It is the responsibility of the State to ensure that non-formal education programmes meet national quality standards, in accordance with curriculum objectives. The obligations under the right to education fall upon the State, which must ensure that national providers respect and fulfil them in their programmes. Where programmes fail to meet the national standards set out in curricula, learning achievements or any other standard set by the State, and where improvements cannot be achieved in collaboration with local stakeholders, the State must take action to make sure that the right to education is being fulfilled.

## **Recommendations**

101. In the light of the above, and taking into consideration the opportunities and challenges in non-formal education, the Special Rapporteur offers the recommendations set out below.

### **Addressing negative perceptions about non-formal education**

102. Governments, policymakers, practitioners and development partners must recognize the important role that non-formal education plays in providing education to out-of-school children and adults. In order to invest the resources, time and attention required to cultivate a successful non-formal education sector, senior politicians, education ministers and policymakers, donors and other stakeholders must publicly acknowledge the important role that quality non-formal education programmes play in ensuring that all learners receive a basic education. The long-standing stigma that exists must be addressed and these programmes must be recognized as important education alternatives. The terms “alternative education” or “flexible education” should be preferred to “non-formal”, as the use of the negative prefix “non” perpetuates the belief that these programmes are not as good, not as well funded and not as desirable.

### **National education systems**

103. A non-formal education system should be established in national legal and policy systems. Such a system should decentralize responsibility for education to regional or local authorities, to ensure responsiveness to local needs, but still meet national standards and be subject to national oversight. Civil society partners and other stakeholders should be engaged throughout the development process and be included in governing bodies. This legal framework should establish minimum curricula and learning standards, school building requirements and teacher qualifications, and it should identify a sustainable, multi-year funding model.

104. It is crucial to integrate all aspects of lifelong learning into a single system. Bridges must be established to allow learners to move between formal and informal programmes, including by establishing recognition, validation and accreditation mechanisms and, possibly, qualification frameworks.

105. Finally, such a non-formal education system must be flexible enough to encompass all non-formal education programmes, from adult literacy to emergency response plans. The system should empower local authorities while holding them to

national standards and providing them with the support they need to achieve those standards.

#### Applying the four As

106. Human rights considerations must be integrated into the design and oversight of non-formal education programmes, just as they should be integrated into any other form of education. States must ensure that national laws and policies, as well as programmes and implementing parties, respect the obligations arising from the right to education.

107. One way to achieve this is by adopting the four As model (see para. 20 above). States should ensure programmes are available by being free for learners, delivered in adequate schools and taught by trained facilitators.

108. Programmes must be accessible and open to all without discrimination of any kind. Schools should be close to learners and, where appropriate, additional support should be provided for marginalized learners.

109. Programmes must be acceptable and provide content that is in line with the national curriculum and meets quality standards while respecting local culture, languages and human rights.

110. Finally, programmes should be adaptable. They should address the needs of children with disabilities and children from local or indigenous cultures, as well as the holistic needs of the community and learners, and be adjusted over time if required.

#### Recognition, validation and accreditation

111. For school-age learners, a framework is required to identify the knowledge level of students who are not in the formal system. Accelerated learning programmes should aim to integrate learners back into the formal system, but alternative programmes for older children may be necessary.

112. For adult learners, a qualification framework for literacy is needed in addition to primary and secondary school qualifications to ensure that non-formal education programmes are designed to achieve recognized qualifications, even for adults who do not return to formal education.

#### National qualification frameworks

113. States must reform their education systems to allow for a fluid transition between non-formal and formal programmes. Learning must be recognized regardless of where it was achieved. A system that recognizes, validates and accredits prior learning must be developed to integrate non-formal learning programmes and formal systems. For the workplace, a national qualification framework is crucial to allow adult learners to obtain skills through informal, non-formal or formal channels, all of which should be recognized by employers.

#### Girls and groups in vulnerable situations

114. Targeted programmes should be established to provide context-sensitive education for out-of-school children, particularly girls and children from groups in vulnerable situations. In collaboration with local communities and civil society partners, States should design programmes that address the underlying reasons why these children are out of school.

#### Promotion of native languages and cultures

115. Especially in situations where the language of instruction in formal schools is a second language, non-formal education programmes should be taught in the mother tongue and a curriculum should be developed in that language, especially for primary education. In developing locally relevant curricula, civil society partners should also promote local cultures and customs.

### **Conflict and natural disaster recovery planning**

116. States, international organizations and NGOs must include provisions for non-formal education programmes in their emergency response plans. Where possible, States should identify the means to deploy trained teachers, with pre-established financial support, to ensure that temporary schools can be rapidly set up and teachers who are unable to return to their regular schools are effectively redeployed.

### **Rural and working children**

117. Flexible non-formal education programmes should be promoted, as they can provide for multigrade classrooms and schedules that respond to the requirements of families that need the support of older children at home. Mobile teaching programmes can provide trained facilitators in locations that may otherwise not support a formal school. These alternatives can ensure that children who do not attend school owing to excessive travel requirements or other demands can have access to education in their village.

### **Financing**

118. Sustainable funding is crucial for ensuring that non-formal education programmes can be planned and endure. Investments must be made in school infrastructure and teacher training to ensure that minimum quality standards are being met.

119. States should consider multi-stakeholder funding models, such as that established in Burkina Faso, to promote international cooperation and improve programme performance.

### **International cooperation**

120. States and donors should enhance the institutional capacities of government and civil society education providers to manage non-formal programmes. In particular, programme and curriculum design, data collection and monitoring capacities must be developed to ensure the quality and sustainability of non-formal education programmes. Donors and development banks should ensure that adequate and stable funding is available for quality programmes that provide students with good learning outcomes; additional resources should be allocated for programmes that reach students with disabilities or groups in vulnerable situations.

### **Engagement with civil society**

121. More coordinated partnerships should be promoted. Such partnerships should be guided by a national vision of education and development that enables each stakeholder, notably Governments, non-State actors such as NGOs and the private sector, donors and communities, to play a role. An inclusive approach to managing policies and programmes is necessary to ensure that stakeholders, including parents and communities, feel a sense of ownership and accountability. Intersectoral collaboration should be promoted.

### **Strengthening partners**

122. A robust regulatory framework with standards, adequate funding and oversight mechanisms will enable States to manage providers of non-formal education programmes. That said, civil society partners may require capacity development in order to attract and retain qualified teachers or facilitators, procure adequate properties for use as schools and deliver quality education outcomes.

123. The effectiveness of non-formal learning should be enhanced through the development of context-specific, gender-sensitive and development-relevant curricula, pedagogies, teaching and learning materials, as well as by adapting the specific training given to teachers and facilitators and by choosing an appropriate language of teaching and learning and appropriate modes of delivery. Such an approach would

**help promote individualized learning and cater to specific needs of certain population groups.**

**Evaluation and data collection**

**124. National data collection and management should be fully integrated to ensure non-formal education programmes are providing learning outcomes that are comparable to those available in the formal system. Data must be disaggregated and detailed to evaluate whether the target populations, including girls and women or members of groups in vulnerable situations, are adequately included and how they are performing.**

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