

Governments must make literacy a priority: experts

High illiteracy rate will only be reduced if governments accord priority to literacy and recognize it as a right, said participants at the end of the two-day global literacy meet here Friday.

Organised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) and Indian ministry of human resource development (HRD), the literacy meet brought together education and finance ministers of 14 countries, including from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

According to the global monitoring report released by Unesco, titled 'Education for all by 2015. Will we make it?' India, Nigeria and Pakistan account for world's 27 percent of out-of-school children.

Less than 60 percent of the total adult population of South and West Asia can read and write.

Commenting at the dismal report card, especially of the South and South-West Asia, Koichiro Matsuura, director general of Unesco, said: 'Illiteracy is receiving minimal political attention and it remains a global disgrace.'

'Literacy is undeniably a right and must be recognized as such. The countries of South and South-West Asia have certainly made great strides towards building literate societies over the past two decades.

'Yet even today about 40 percent of the total adult population cannot read or write and the great majority of these people are women,' Matsuura said.

According to Unesco's statistics, some 380 million adults throughout South and South-West Asia do not have basic literacy skills. The world total is 774 million, although the Global Monitoring Report suggests that the figure may be much higher.

In Central Asia, although overall literacy levels are high, there remains an important gender gap.

The participants at the conference stressed that literacy must be recognized as a right, and fully integrated into education sector planning with sufficient funding. Pointing out that over two-thirds of illiterate adults are women, they underscored the need for literacy policies to address gender disparities.

Programmes, they recommended, should be strongly linked to life-skills development, including entrepreneurial and income-generating activities.

The conference also recommended that although governments must take primary responsibility for providing literacy learning opportunities, partnerships with civil society organizations, community-based associations and the private sector also be encouraged.

The Nov 29-30 conference is the fourth in a series of six regional and sub-regional conferences organized by Unesco to promote global literacy. The first three took place earlier this year in Doha (Qatar), Beijing (China) and Bamako (Mali).

Two more conferences covering [Europe](#) and Latin America and the Caribbean will be held in the course of 2008.

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