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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

**Reflections on the Fifth UNESCO World Conference
on Adult Education : Hamburg, 1997**

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EXPANDING INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

REFLECTIONS ON THE FIFTH UNESCO WORLD CONFERENCE ON ADULT EDUCATION : HAMBURG, 1997

All International Conferences organised by the United Nations System propose intensifying and deepening of International Cooperation, so does this Conference. What is the purpose of International Cooperation? What should be its meaning in today's global context ? What are the mechanisms which make International Cooperation effective in accomplishing its purposes? This and many related issues were discussed in a special thematic session during the Hamburg Conference. My own views on this are briefly enumerated below.

Purposes :

International Cooperation in Adult Education must have atleast the following four purposes.

1. It should promote greater visibility and universal recognition of adult education and adult learning as an integral part of life-long learning in contemporary societies.
2. It should provide the possibility of improving the quality of delivery of Adult Education as well as the necessary institutional and human capacity for excellence in Adult Education.
3. It should promote and sustain greater commitment and policy support to adult learning as a part of life-long education and generate supportive political will.

4. It should contribute towards increased availability of resources, particularly to countries and regions facing such scarcity of resources.

Meaning

The meaning of international cooperation historically has been narrowly defined to **international assistance**. It implies a one way flow of Aid which is normally translated in funds. This further implies transfer of funds from richer countries to poorer countries, from the north to the south.

In this narrow meaning, international cooperation, therefore, has historically been transferring all funds from the governments of the north to the governments of the south. In case of adult education and UNESCO related initiatives it has historically meant transfer of funds from industrialised developed countries to the ministries of education in the governments of developing, poorer countries.

Clearly, international cooperation in today's context can not accomplish any of the purposes mentioned above in this rather restricted and narrow meaning assigned to it in the past. In its expanded meaning, international cooperation must be seen as a **mutually beneficial exercise for cooperating partners**. All partners engaged in cooperation must benefit from the act of cooperation. This benefit should be seen as enhancing their capacities to pursue their goals in adult education. In this sense, international cooperation should be a **mutually empowering** experience for cooperating partners.

The second issue is the definition of the partners. International cooperation must go beyond Government to Government and Ministry of Education to Ministry of Education cooperation. We know from our experience that adult learning is pursued in such a diverse ways that all Ministries of the government in any country should have a stake in promotion of adult learning not just Ministry of

Education. Likewise, in the countries of the North and the South, there are a variety of other actors, other than the government, which need to be parts to such a cooperation. There is a wide body of grass-roots Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) involved in delivery of adult education services. Private, for-profit providers of adult continuing education services should also be significant stake-holders in a cooperative arrangement. National, regional and international networks of NGOs promoting adult education as well as other sectors of development should be cooperating partners as well. Academy Institutes, Research and Training Institutions, Universities as well as Institutions promoting Human Resource Development should also be viewed as significant stake-holders in such a cooperative arrangement. Trade Unions, Social Movements and other societal initiatives must find a place as co-partners as well.

Therefore, the expanded meaning of international cooperation would **firstly** go beyond the meaning of transfer of money from one place to another, Sharing of experience, information, skills is as important, if not more. Building mechanisms for mutual support and solidarity can go along with any international cooperation.

Secondly, the expanded meaning of international cooperation must include a wide variety of actors from the grass-roots to the national and global levels. This plurality of activities among the plurality of partners will provide a thrust and momentum to international cooperation that is necessary for accomplishing the purposes mentioned above.

Therefore, the challenge facing all those committed to adult education and adult learning is to find ways to make this expanded meaning of International Cooperation a reality.