

CONFERENCE REPORT

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LIFELONG LEARNING WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BANGLADESH

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Asoke Bhattacharya

Bangladesh Institute of Lifelong Learning

“Today’s concept of education is synonymous to lifelong learning. Today’s pledge is to make ours a learning society”, said Dr. Dipu Moni MP, the Hon’ble Minister of Education of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. She was inaugurating on 22 February, 2019, the International Conference entitled “Lifelong Learning in the Developing Countries with special reference to Bangladesh” as the Chief Guest. The conference was organized by the Bangladesh Institute of Lifelong Learning of Dhaka Ahsania Mission and was held at Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology, Tejgaon, Dhaka during 22-23 February, 2019. “In this concept, each member of the Society learns throughout life -- in schools, colleges and universities, and in the working and non-working life, even during leisure through informal ways”, she added.

In his address Prof. Asoke Bhattacharya, Director, Bangladesh Institute of Lifelong Learning after welcoming the guests, said, “Bangladesh is an ideal country for adopting lifelong learning. It is neither too big in size or population or too small. The country has an envious tradition of people’s movements. In the recent past, it has achieved significant progress in its economic and social fronts. A concerted effort to achieve educational uplift for the whole cross-sections of the population will surely help sustain its economic and social gains “.

Ms. Sun Lei, Officer in Charge of UNESCO Dhaka Office and a guest of honour, said in her address:

“Education is UNESCO’s top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation for building peace and sustainable development. UNESCO, as the United Nations specialized agency with a focus on education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the education 2030 agenda, a global movement for sustainable development through 17 sustainable development goals .Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) is central to the achievement of other 16 SDGs, an essential condition for human fulfilment , peace, tolerance, sustainable development , economic growth, decent work, gender equality and responsible global citizenship.”

Prof. Anders Holm of the University of Copenhagen and a guest of honour, reiterated the role of lifelong learning as the essential element for the development of a nation and mentioned the Grundtvigian concept of learning for life which played the key role in the progress and development of the Danish nation.

Mr. Kazi Rafiqul Alam, the President of Dhaka Ahsania Mission in his presidential address said that Bangladesh Institute of Lifelong Learning was his dream project. “Since the expertise in the field of lifelong learning will be available here, we shall be able to collaborate with the Government in its programmes on lifelong learning. With the galaxy of foreign experts at our disposal and with active cooperation of the UNESCO, we shall be able to design and develop appropriate lifelong learning programmes for Bangladesh”, he said.

Prof. Manzoor Ahmed, Professor Emeritus of BRAC University delivered a keynote address. In his lecture he said, “I assume that a case for lifelong learning does not have to be made again in this era of knowledge economy and Information society. The key concern is that it is not happening, at least not, in our part of the world. Therefore the key challenge is -- how to make it happen.”

Dwelling on the antecedence of the concept, he said, that ‘Lifelong Education’ and the ‘learning society’ were “the key

takeaways of the 1972 report of the Faure Commission. The first was seen as the keystone of education policy, the latter a strategy to involve society as a whole as participants and actors in education.”

He elaborated:

“In the 1970s, at about the time of the Faure Commission report, the three-fold typology of education – formal, non-formal and informal – gained currency. Coombs and Ahmed distinguished between the three modes of education as ‘analytically useful, and generally in accord with current realities’. They also said that the need was to visualize the various educational activities as potential components of a coherent and flexible overall learning system that must be strengthened, diversified and linked more closely to the needs and processes of national development. They noted the growing consensus that nations should strive to build ‘lifelong learning systems’ offering every individual diverse learning opportunities.”

He further stated: “The Belem Framework for Action, announced at the 6th. International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), affirmed that lifelong learning ‘from cradle to grave’ was a philosophy, a conceptual framework and an organizing principle of all forms of education, based on inclusive, emancipatory, humanistic and democratic values.”

Referring to Bangladesh, he said:

“A Non-formal Education Policy for Bangladesh was approved and was made official by a gazette notification on February 9, 2006. It broadly reflected the mission, scope and objectives as recommended by a task force appointed for this purpose. The bureau of Non-formal Education (BNFE), already established in 2005, was tasked with implementing the policy. However, BNFE established in the pattern of a Government department, rather than that of an autonomous body with professional and technical capacity, found it difficult to promote the policy. A Non-formal Education Act was adopted in 2014 to provide a legal framework for fulfilling the obligation regarding adult and non-formal education. The Act provided a definition of LLL.”

Prof. Manzoor Ahmed said in this context, “It is necessary now to connect literacy, basic skills development and lifelong learning opportunities and plan learning provisions, facilities and resources accordingly. Widespread use of ICT resources for organised lifelong learning, e.g. through a nationwide permanent network of community learning centres, and expanding self-learning opportunities, have to be the key features of non-formal education and lifelong learning.” He then cited the cases of China and India where lifelong learning has been taken up in right earnest.

The second keynote address was delivered by Professor Peter Mayo of the University of Malta. Professor Mayo captioned his lecture as “LLL and the SDGs. “In his address he referred to the definition provided by UNESCO. The holistic approach in the definition, he said, speaks of the economic, cultural and other resources needed to make learning a reality both in formal learning environments, such as schools, and the community at large.

The low-income countries, mostly located in Global South are home to a disproportionately large share of the global out of school population. The creation of adequate LLL policies in these low-income countries would constitute a massive paradigmatic shift. LLL could be catalyst for preventing migrants and refugees from risking their lives in their quest for better prospects in the global south. LLL, he said, constitutes one of the contributory means to bring about a humanitarian change in this aspect of cross-border mobility. He also said that education was a dependent variable. It cannot bring social change on its own but can contribute to change.

He pointed out that the UN had worked across and with states to provide guidance, in terms of both the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set in 2000 to be met by 2015, and the 17 Sustainable goals (SDGs) scheduled to be met by 2030.

Prof. Peter Mayo contested the ‘employability’ mantra of the neo-liberal economies promoted since 1990s by the OECD and EU. He said that employability did not mean employment. He contested the western bias against indigenous knowledge. He preferred learning to be replaced by education which is the responsibility of the state.

Around twenty four (24) papers, out of fifty (50) participated in the plenary and parallel sessions. The organisers have asked for full papers from those who submitted abstracts.