APPEAL will convene the Regional Seminar on CLCs during 23 - 27 March 2004 at the Lotus Hotel, Pang Suan Kaew, Chiang Mai, Thailand. This meeting is for CLC project planners, implementers, personnel in other community-based NFE projects, NFE personnel from other regions, international organizations, NGOs and potential donor agencies. Participants will have an opportunity to exchange their views and experiences on the potential use of CLCs as change agents for community development.

Since 1998, the Community Learning Centre Project has been carried out within the framework of UNESCO’s Asia-Pacific Programme of Education for All (APPEAL) with financial assistance from the Japanese and Norwegian governments. During the period 1998-2002 eighteen countries in the Asia-Pacific region took part in the project. They included Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Thailand, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. Later, in 2003, three other countries -- Kazakhstan, Samoa and Sri Lanka -- decided to join the project.

APPEAL has facilitated the exchange of experiences among the participating countries. A series of capacity building activities for key national-level non-formal education personnel were conducted during periodic meetings and workshops. In addition, the United Nation Literacy Decade (UNLD), under way since 2003, has emphasised ‘community participation’ as one of the key areas of action and has encouraged the establishment of CLCs. While innovative experiences have been successful at the grassroots level, further efforts are required to improve the management and administration of CLCs as well as to institutionalize them as an integral part of national strategies under UNLD and EFA (Education for All).

>>To be continued on next page
Objectives

The main objectives of the seminar are to share the experiences of CLCs and to explore future strategies and actions within the framework of EFA and UNLD. More specific objectives are as follows:

1) To share innovative experiences for the effective operation of CLCs, especially in the areas of community participation, resource mobilization, capacity building, linkage and networking, monitoring and evaluation, documentation and policy/legislative support.

2) To discuss and explore the further potential of CLCs as change agents for community development, including advocacy and promotion in such areas as gender equality, HIV/AIDS prevention, early childhood care and education, the environment, poverty alleviation, mother tongue/bilingual education for ethnic minorities, human rights, local/traditional culture and the effective use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

3) To identify future directions and strategies of CLCs with particular emphasis on sustainability and policy/legislative support for the institutionalization of these centres within the national EFA and UNLD plans at national and regional levels.

Topics of plenary sessions and roundtables

Topics covered at the seminar fall into two general areas: management aspects and CLC activities for community development. Under the former, topics include community participation, resource mobilization, capacity building, linkages and networking, monitoring and evaluation, and systematic documentation.

CLC activities fall under a number of interesting areas such as early childhood care and education, literacy and basic education, gender equality, ICTs, health and sanitation (including HIV/AIDS prevention), the environment, income generation programmes for poverty alleviation, mother tongue education for ethnic minorities, human rights and democracy, and local and traditional culture.

The seminar will consist of both plenary sessions and roundtables. Each of the above topics will be presented during plenary and then will be elaborated and discussed during roundtables where more speakers will be involved and participation encouraged. Those attending the roundtables will have an opportunity to share their experiences as well.
and strengthening networks at all levels and with other sectors, particularly the private sector.

As new programme areas of APPEAL and ACCU, participants suggested the following areas for future activities: culture, science, international understanding, tolerance, ethics, peace building, poverty eradication, senior citizens, food, legal literacy, family literacy, early childhood care and education, and the environment.

The participants had an opportunity to visit a lifelong learning centre in Tochigi prefecture, located north of Tokyo, to observe programmes for youth and adults including a library and classes on culture, art and ICT. They learned about the importance of strong government support, intersectoral approaches, and programmes based on actual needs.

Gender Equality in Basic Education and Lifelong Learning

Recent Developments

As a part of activities undertaken by the Gender in Education Network (GENIA), several countries (Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam), with the support of APPEAL, have begun to provide gender training to provincial level education planners and implementers. Other countries in the region are conducting gender-related research. In Kazakhstan, researchers are looking at issues related to the teaching profession totally dominated by women, and what can be done to attract more men to the profession. In Thailand, a study on sexual harassment in secondary schools is being piloted, while in Pakistan a Punjab study is exploring the reasons for the high dropout rate amongst girls, especially in grades 3 and 4. Mongolia is planning to examine access and retention issues in basic education related to remote ethnic populations, with a special emphasis on gender issues.

In December 2003, a new version of the Guidelines for Planning for Gender Responsive EFA Plans was published. Changes include expanded sections on implementation and monitoring issues, and updated references and Website list. The GENIA Toolkit for Gender Equality in Education is also being revised and reprinted. The new version, expected to be out by the end of February, will contain additional gender lenses (on community learning centres) and information about gender and HIV/AIDS. Finally, APPEAL has published a "gender planner," Has Gender Been on Your Agenda Today? Countdown to 2005: Eliminating Gender Disparities in Education. Besides being a planner for 2004, this product contains useful references to the Dakar Framework for Action, Millenium Development Goals, references to guidelines and Websites, gender proverbs and key gender indicators on the situation in Asia.

For further information please contact: gender@unescobkk.org or www.unescobkk.org/gender
Five Countries Start Using ICT for Community Empowerment

In 2002 APPEAL launched the project “ICT Application for Non-Formal Education Programmes” with the support of the Japanese Funds-in-Trust. During the first phase, five countries (Indonesia, Lao PDR, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Uzbekistan) are implementing programmes and activities to empower communities through the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT).

In Lao PDR, the project is focusing on improving village incomes amongst rural youth in Namon Nuea and Chahom villages in Vientiane province. Under the project, the NFE Department is strengthening community learning centres (CLCs) to serve as resource centres where ICT equipment is used to disseminate news and information in various areas including life skills and income generation. Project staff provide training in CLC planning and management and in the skills needed to use ICT for maintaining a community database, community accounting and the marketing of community products, among other activities. In addition, project participants are renovating the existing meeting hall of the District Education Bureau in Vang Vieng district to serve as the district cultural and information resource centre. This centre will preserve the culture of the district and provide information to tourists, especially in regard to the sale of local products.

In Sri Lanka, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement is establishing multi-purpose community telecentres for community development in Rathnapura, Gampaha and Kulyaputiyia districts. These community telecentres will serve Sarvodaya’s village banks as well as six CLCs operated under the NFE Unit of the Ministry of Education. Project activities include the development of community databases and the dissemination of appropriate information to villagers and entrepreneurs through Sarvodaya’s Mobile Multimedia Unit. Also in operation are an entrepreneurial skills development programme, the provision of revolving funds for villages to start self-employment activities, and computer training for village bank staff, village volunteers and CLC officials.

In Thailand, the project, under the Northern Regional NFE Centre, is developing inter-village connectivity and empowering the members of rural communities (particularly youth) who want to use ICT as a tool for community development (especially in the areas of family accounting, community savings and community store accounting). The sites are Ban Samkha, Ban Tung, Ban Gom and Ban Don Fai in Mae Ta district, Lampang province. In particular, the project tries to extend the learning experiences in Ban Samkha to the other three connected villages by means of ICT laboratories in those villages. Project staff also organize and coordinate the sharing of learning among all residents of the targeted villages.

In Uzbekistan, the project aims at facilitating the application of ICT for community empowerment in Samarkand, Andijon and Bukhara. Under the project, the National Commission of Uzbekistan for UNESCO is helping to develop community databases and documentation for community planning and management. Other activities include establishing an ICT network among CLCs in the target areas and providing training to all personnel and community people at the project sites. An important component of the project is the development of ICT materials for community
Empowerment, poverty alleviation and improving the quality of life.

In Indonesia, the Directorate General of NFE and Youth is planning to introduce an ICT-based learning model to CLCs in Central Java and South Kalimantan. The planned activities include community data collection using the PRA approach through CLCs and a programme using the Internet to enable greater access to data and improved information flows between local communities and the Government. There will be learning programmes relying on Internet and cable TV access for improving learning activities, as well as providing more prompt and effective consultation and problem solving via ICT on the part of supervisors.

Achieving quality and equality in education is a main concern for UNESCO. To assist with practical methodological support, the Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environments has been developed and is now in its final phase of production. The toolkit offers a holistic, practical perspective on the ways schools and classrooms can become more inclusive, learning-friendly and gender-sensitive. It is intended to be used by educators (teachers and school administrators), but should be of interest to any other group who cares about their school. It contains five booklets. Booklet One describes the characteristics and benefits of inclusive, learning-friendly environments. The second booklet gives advice on how to work with families and communities, the third describes ways to include traditionally excluded children, and the fourth presents tools and ideas for making classrooms more inclusive, child-centred and gender-sensitive. Finally, the fifth booklet discusses ways to create healthy and protective school policies and services. The toolkit comprises 250 pages; an English version is expected to be available online at www.unescobkk.org/education/appeal from the end of March 2004. For more information on the toolkit, please contact gender@unescobkk.org.

Complementing this tool at the national level, the Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities: Towards Inclusion initiative, a flagship of the Education for All (EFA) programme, was recently launched by a number of international organizations to raise awareness and to lobby governments, donors and NGOs. One of its aims is to ensure that educating children with disabilities is included in national planning and is adequately supported by funding and resources. Another purpose is to make sure that inclusive education is integrated into national EFA action plans and takes into account good practices employed in other countries.

To commemorate the ten years after Salamanca Conference in 1994, a regional workshop on the Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities: Towards Inclusion will be organized in Bangkok 19-21 October 2004. To commemorate the ten years after Salamanca Conference in 1994, a regional workshop on the Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities: Towards Inclusion will be organized in Bangkok 19-21 October 2004.
Ethnic minorities are disadvantaged groups who are often illiterate and live in poor conditions. Education for All means a quality education for everyone, including the disadvantaged. UNESCO also has a strong commitment to the inherent value of cultural diversity and the need to maintain it.

UNESCO Bangkok is currently supporting five countries (Bangladesh, China, India, the Philippines and Thailand) as they undertake research and, with the participation of linguists, prepare literacy materials using mother tongue/bilingual approaches for reaching ethnic minorities through pilot projects. All five countries have completed the development of literacy materials.

**Project Objective**

The general objective of the project is to increase the literacy rate among ethnic minority people (which contributes to the achievement of EFA Goal 4) through providing them with an opportunity to access basic education (EFA Goal 2) in order to improve the quality of their lives and preserve their culture through the provision of relevant and comprehensive literacy programmes.

**Project Framework**

First, community studies are undertaken in order to determine the situation of the local population, its learning needs, and the languages spoken and written by members of the targeted communities. An appropriate orthography is necessary if there is no system of writing in the target community. Using the needs identified, project staff -- with the aid of community people and professional linguists -- prepare mother tongue/bilingual learning materials and try them out during field-testing. Teachers and facilitators receive training in the skills needed in using these materials.
Case Studies Needed for Mother Tongue/Bilingual Education

The Asia-Pacific region is home to over 2,400 of the world’s languages. Many children in the region are excluded from education because the language of instruction differs from their mother tongue. UNESCO is committed to achieve education for all, which includes in particular a focus on children from ethnic minorities whose educational opportunities are very limited. In 1954, UNESCO was the first UN agency to stipulate the importance of mother tongue education and to advocate for more bi/multilingual language in education planning. In 2003, UNESCO published a position paper on education in a multilingual world that can be used both as a theoretical basis and as a practical tool for the development of mother tongue/bilingual education.

Providing education in minority languages has traditionally been considered a difficult task, but research shows that local languages can play an essential role in helping learners make the successful transition to full participation in the formal education system. Consecutively, increases in the number of ethnic minority students enrolled and in their achievement levels have been recorded. Most of the examples are from the non-formal sector. As there are an increasing number of pilot projects using local languages in various education activities in the region, UNESCO Bangkok is trying to collect successful examples of these projects to use as case studies. These studies will be part of a resource package to promote the use of mother tongue education at different levels. If you would like to contribute or to suggest examples of mother tongue/bilingual education projects, please contact Ms. Vibeke Jensen at v.jensen@unescobkk.org particularly techniques for teaching ethnic minorities. Finally, they actually use these materials to conduct literacy classes in the targeted communities. Learners are expected to apply what they have learned in their daily lives in order to improve their overall quality of life.

Project Focus

The project emphasises the importance of capacity building, empowerment, improving the quality of life, poverty alleviation, feedback from research, and sustainability. The organizations responsible for the project, together with local community people (leaders, facilitators and others), will share responsibility for formulating plans, developing a writing system (if needed), and preparing the appropriate curriculum and materials. Because the mother tongue/bilingual approach is certainly a new one for these individuals, active involvement in the project will give them confidence and experience through the process of learning by doing. Hence such capacity building empowers them to take charge of the destiny of their community.

The content of the learning materials covers areas that are appropriate for quality of life improvement such as health, nutrition, the environment, preservation of local culture, and ways of generating income through farming or marketing. Research on whether learning via the mother tongue can ultimately help minority peoples to learn and to improve their lives is essential to judge the effects of the project. We expect that the results of the research will influence government decision making in regard to the use of the mother tongue/bilingual approach in language policies for ethnic minorities.

Finally, if the responsible organizations and community people know how to successfully implement project activities that bring about positive change, we expect that they will be able to continue and expand the project by themselves.

Participating Countries

In addition to the five countries mentioned above, four additional countries will join the project: Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal and Vietnam. Cambodia has already started, but the rest are in the process of identifying responsible organizations for implementing the project.
importance of targeting caregivers was emphasised as an important strategy to reach young children, and community learning centres (CLCs) were discussed as an entry point for such activities. 

The workshop also focused on raising awareness amongst UNESCO staff regarding HIV/AIDS and issues related to children infected and/or affected by this ever-growing challenge. Again, in order to promote preventive education -- including how to care for people affected by AIDS and avoid discrimination -- basic awareness about the disease and how it is spread – (as well as how it is not spread) is necessary. The Life Skills Development Foundation of Thailand presented their strategy of working with schools, caregivers and communities to create replicable models of rights-based child-friendly schools that respond to the special needs of children in distress, develop psychosocial competencies, and promote healthy lifestyles and resilience among children and youth affected by AIDS in three districts of upper northern Thailand.

During the week, the participants made two field visits, which reminded everyone about where the ultimate impact of our work should be.

Ultimately, the workshop was instrumental in strengthening the network amongst UNESCO ECCE focal points in the region. In regard to the role of the regional bureau, APPEAL will engage in more systematic dissemination of ECCE advocacy materials and the field offices will seek technical assistance from the regional ECCE focal point when needed.

For more information, please contact Annelene Rør a.ror@unescobkk.org

---

**ECCE Capacity Building Workshop for UNESCO Focal Points in the Asia-Pacific Region**

During the week of 9-13 February 2004, focal points (representatives) for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from eleven UNESCO offices in the Asia-Pacific region gathered in Chiang Mai, Thailand, to strengthen UNESCO’s regional response to EFA Dakar Goal number 1. The workshop was arranged by APPEAL with funding from the regional bureau’s budget for advocacy for EFA. This was the first time such a workshop had been organised for UNESCO staff. Because staff in the field offices have a range of responsibilities -- often including education at all levels -- a week focusing on ECCE was for many a good opportunity to increase their office’s technical assistance to government counterparts.

The agenda for the workshop included sessions on reasons to promote ECCE, ECCE indicators, and ECCE in EFA national plans of action. Different offices shared their ECCE activities, and there was a lot of interaction and discussion throughout the week. A main issue for the organisers was to refocus on the individual child and caregiver as the beneficiary and target for UNESCO’s work, even if most of our efforts are concentrated at the policy level, far away from actual children. In order to make policy more sensitive to viable ECCE options, we need to know what children and caregivers need as well as how they are affected by the policy. To these ends, sessions focused on the provision of quality programmes at low cost and the benefits of including children with special needs and disadvantaged and vulnerable children in early childhood programmes. The
UNESCO Strategy on Human Rights

UNESCO has since its inception played an important role in the field of human rights. This commitment is reaffirmed in the current Medium-Term Strategy for 2002-2007, in which the promotion and protection of human rights constitute one of the main priorities for the entire organisation. This commitment also goes in line with the United Nations Secretary-General’s reform programme for the UN. As a response, the UNESCO Strategy on Human Rights was developed and subsequently adopted in the 32nd session of the General Conference in October 2003.

The overall goal of the strategy is to increase UNESCO’s contribution to the advancement of human rights within its fields of competence. The implementation of the strategy involves all sectors and field offices. The emphasis is primarily on mainstreaming a human rights-based approach into all of UNESCO’s activities and programmes, encouraging research and disseminating knowledge on human rights, further promoting human rights education and implementing UNESCO’s human rights standards. Advancing women’s rights, equal gender opportunities and participation will be a priority.

Mainstreaming a human rights-based approach implies that all project activities and actions should further the realization of human rights -- that human rights principles and standards should guide all phases of the programming process, and should contribute to the development of the capacities of ‘duty-bearers’ to meet their obligations and of ‘rights-holders’ to claim their rights. Thus UNESCO staff must always undertake a human rights analysis as part of their project assessment, making sure that safeguards are built into the project design and that human rights are promoted through the project planning process.

The strategy document 32 C/57 can be downloaded from: unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001316/131627e.pdf

Analysis of Responses to Children Affected by AIDS in Thailand

The AIDS pandemic is continuing to affect thousands of lives, and in countries like Thailand where 1.8 per cent of adults between 15 and 49 years of age are living with AIDS, the impact on children is enormous. It is estimated that between 20,000 and 50,000 children are currently infected with HIV/AIDS and that 4,000 new infections of children take place each year. Approximately 290,000 children in Thailand are currently orphaned due to AIDS and the estimates project about 380,000 such orphans in 2005. AIDS remains Thailand’s leading cause of death. Stigma and discrimination towards people living with AIDS are increasingly identified as problems throughout the country. Children are the most vulnerable, but no official structures exist to take care of them (or adults). Various responses to meet the needs of affected children have emerged over the past decade including those by different NGOs, private institutions and state-run orphanages. However, these initiatives vary in their approaches and comprehensiveness in relation to the holistic needs of the child.

A few months ago UNICEF and UNESCO jointly commissioned an analysis of responses to children affected by AIDS in Thailand. The objectives of the study were to:

- Describe existing responses to the care and support of HIV/AIDS affected children in Thailand;
- Assess, in broad terms, the quality of care and support of HIV/AIDS affected children in Thailand; and
- Formulate a proposal to strengthen the Government’s and other partners’ responses to AIDS affected children and their families/caregivers.

A first draft of this analysis has been completed. The different types of strategies to care for children affected by AIDS include the following: 1) care by grandparents and other kin; 2) orphanages/residential homes; 3) group homes; 4) community-based care; 5) school/child day-care centre care and support; and 6) antiretroviral therapy. The strengths and weaknesses of various strategies are discussed, and three strategies -- residential homes, group homes and care by kin -- are assessed according to 16 indicators measuring physical, psychological, social, economic, educational and counselling components.

A range of strategies are necessary to meet the needs of children affected by AIDS in Thailand. UNICEF and UNESCO will continue to collaborate with various stakeholders and donors to assist the Thai Government in further elaborating its response to these children.

For further information, please contact Annelene Rør a.ror@unescobkk.org
Manual on Rights-Based Education

The right to education is acknowledged as a fundamental human right, with education considered both a goal in itself and a means for sustainable human development. As part of the UNESCO Bangkok collaborative project with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Katarina Tomasevski, the Manual on Rights-Based Education is under development.

The manual translates globally accepted human rights standards into guidance for national education strategies. It is a reference tool for policy makers and practitioners in education as well as for those working in international cooperation. The realization of the right to education is a continuing process as is the attainment of education for all. The manual aims to facilitate human rights mainstreaming in education by listing and describing relevant human rights standards, highlighting how they could best be translated into education practice on the micro level, and pointing to the key human rights questions that should be addressed at the macro level. The basis for this manual is international human rights law.

The manual uses a simple 4-A scheme to explain government human rights obligations, namely to make education “available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable.” It highlights the necessity to make education available, namely to ensure free and compulsory education for all children. Also, it points out the key requirement of international human rights law to respect parental freedom of choice. In ensuring accessibility of education, the manual prioritizes the elimination of discrimination as international human rights law mandates. The current focus on the quality of education is addressed under the heading to make education acceptable by summarizing those human rights standards that should apply to the processes of teaching and learning. Regarding adaptability, the manual emphasizes the key principle of child rights, namely that education should adapt to children, to the best interests of each child.

It points out the need to adopt education so as to enhance all human rights, thus putting into practice rights-based education. This means also that children should be seen as holders of rights, which implies not only the right to have access to education, but also that human rights must be applied in education and promoted through education. Participation in education is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a process that should develop self-esteem and confidence, an ability to apply knowledge and skills in diverse circumstances and for a spectrum of social, economic and political purposes. The manual exemplifies linkages between human rights and education using a variety of country-specific examples from Asia and adds global profiles for particularly important issues, such as the elimination of child labour and child marriage through education.

The manual is currently being edited and should be available online at the end of April 2004 at: www.unescobkk.org/education/appeal/index.htm
New CD on CLCs in the Asia-Pacific Region to be Released This Year

APPEAL will produce a documentary CD on Community Learning Centre (CLC) activities in order to facilitate the sharing of experiences amongst countries in the Asia-Pacific region as well as with other regions. This product will also strengthen advocacy efforts at regional and national levels for establishing CLCs, and will supplement existing learning and training materials on CLCs by providing visual images of actual practices.

The documentary CD will consist of two sections – an overview of APPEAL’s CLC regional programme, and a brief summary of CLC activities in each country that has participated in the programme for more than one year.

The product should be completed and ready for dissemination in June 2004. It will be part of the currently developed APPEAL Resource Pack for Literacy and Continuing Education. The APPEAL Resource Pack is a compilation of all the existing non-formal education resources of APPEAL into a handy package, with short summaries of each of the contents and some CDs containing the full documentation of selected materials, as well as the CLC documentary video CD.

APPEAL Activities [2004-2005]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Meetings/events</th>
<th>Organizations</th>
<th>Participating countries</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Guidelines for video on CLC</td>
<td>21 countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Call for proposal on life skills</td>
<td>18 countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Research on models of equivalency programmes</td>
<td>4 countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-27 March</td>
<td>Regional CLC review meeting</td>
<td>23 countries</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chiangmai, Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April-December</td>
<td>Pilot project on life skills</td>
<td>7 countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Regional workshop on ICT</td>
<td>10 countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Research on models of networking</td>
<td>7 countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research on models of private sector</td>
<td>4 countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Regional workshop on mother tongue and bilingual literacy programmes for ethnic minorities</td>
<td>10 countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Regional workshop on capacity building on NFE resource development</td>
<td>23 countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>Regional workshop on out-of-school children</td>
<td>4 countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Regional workshop on networking and private sector</td>
<td>23 countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>International conference on NFE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If any ARTC member institutions are interested in seconding their staff to join APPEAL, please send their CVs to the APPEAL office at UNESCO Bangkok.
UNESCO Headquarters and UNESCO Bangkok, in collaboration with Thailand’s Office of Non-Formal Education Commission (ONFEC) and the Thai National Commission for UNESCO, organised the 2003 International Literacy Day (ILD) celebration events on 8 September 2003. These occurred in connection with the ONFEC’s own celebration of its equivalent of ILD, Non-Formal Education Day.

The venue was the IMPACT Centre, located in Muang Thong Thani, Bangkok. UNESCO took advantage of the occasion to conduct the regional launch of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD), and to hold a literacy prize awarding ceremony and the opening ceremony of the International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) Review Meeting (UN Conference Centre, Bangkok, 9-11 September 2003). In addition, a roundtable, Literacy and Gender, was organised with the participation of panelists from the Asia-Pacific region.

ILD was celebrated with more than 1,350 Thai non-formal educators and the 350 participants of CONFINTEA. The Thai Minister of Education opened the occasion and spoke at the launch of the UNLD. The testimony of an ex-literacy learner and a demonstration lesson from a literacy worker generated enthusiasm and joy amongst the audience. The opening ceremony and the launch of the UNLD were widely covered by the local media, including a live TV programme.

The National EFA Coordinators in East and Southeast Asian countries were also invited to the ILD events and attended the Fifth Coordinators’ meeting, which was held in Bangkok on 10-12 September 2003. The meeting consisted of five substantive sessions. The sessions reported the following main outcomes:

- National EFA Plans have been completed in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Republic of Korea, Thailand and Vietnam, while Lao PDR, Mongolia and the Philippines are almost finished with their plans.

The main EFA challenges identified include resource mobilization, setting specific targets, advocacy and ensuring quality.

Specialists in literacy and continuing education should explore strategies for satisfying the unmet needs of disadvantaged population groups through improved linkages to formal education and working with NGOs and the private sector.

Effective decentralization through education reform is the key to successful implementation of EFA plans, especially in regard to reaching disadvantaged groups.

EFA monitoring and evaluation can be improved through strengthening methods of data management (including disaggregation by location and population), verification, and sharing and exchanging reliable data on NFE and early childhood care and education.

As feedback from the meeting, the national coordinators expressed the need in future meetings for practical sessions on ways to enhance the effective implementation of EFA plans.