

Where to Next in the Asia Pacific and Beyond: ASPBAE's Journey with ICAE and Partners in Informing and Following Up on CONFINTEA VII Marrakech Framework for Action

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Optimising this opportunity to contribute to the Special Issue of Convergence to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), ASPBAE deemed it valuable to document and share its journey with ICAE and other partners in informing the processes leading to and following-up on the outcomes of the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII) as codified in the Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA).

In the main, this piece is meant to serve as a resource for participation in the follow-up process of CONFINTEA VII especially in concretising the MFA, and for future engagements of civil society advocates for adult learning and education (ALE), particularly members and partners of ASPBAE and ICAE, to inform the next CONFINTEA process.

Influencing and learning together: Documenting and synthesising the civil society commitment at all levels in the CONFINTEA VII processes

CONFINTEA, as a framework and commitment-setting process every 12 years, is a UNESCO intergovernmental conference (Category II), enabling a global policy dialogue on adult learning and education (ALE) and related research and advocacy.

The most recent one, CONFINTEA VII, was envisaged to help shape policy directions for ALE within a lifelong learning perspective in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) laid down in the United Nations' 2030

Agenda for Sustainable Development in general, and SDG 4 on education in particular. It was a global policy space for Ministers from UNESCO Member States and other stakeholders to discuss the current situation of ALE and articulate a set of recommendations for its further development over the coming 12 years, drawing on the 5th Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE), which was launched on this occasion.

In sum, the recommendations that emerge from this process - in this case through the Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA) as the main outcome document of CONFINTEA VII - will guide policy, practice and international cooperation in ALE.

Within the UNESCO architecture, it is the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), in cooperation with a host country government – in this case, the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco – which was assigned to coordinate the organization of and preparatory process for CONFINTEA VII, in partnership with a broad range of international stakeholders such as other UN agencies, CSOs/NGOs and other partners.

For the CONFINTEA VII, the working documents that guided the process and its outcomes include the following: UNESCO Futures of Education Report; CONFINTEA VI Belém Framework for Action (BFA); 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE); Synthesis of the Global Report on ALE (GRALE) 1, 2, 3, and 4; GRALE 5, Synthesis reports of the CONFINTEA VII regional preparatory conferences and; Suwon-Osan CONFINTEA VI Mid-Term Review Statement.

There were key spaces in which the civil society, including ASPBAE, ICAE, DVV International, and the academe have engaged in and fully optimised to advance the ALE agenda with a rights-based, gender-transformative, climate-saving and sustainable lenses:

Participation in the 5th Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE 5) process

The Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) was the main mechanism for monitoring UNESCO Member States' progress in meeting the CONFINTEA VI or Belem Framework for Action (BFA) commitments as well as the Recommendations on Adult Learning and Education (RALE), adopted by Members States in 2015. The 5th Report or GRALE 5, one of the working documents for CONFINTEA VII, had a thematic focus on Citizenship

Education and offered an overview of emerging trends and challenges in the field of ALE.

In 2020, ASPBAE, ICAE and DVV International partnered with UIL in organizing the Asia Pacific Regional capacity-building webinar on GRALE 5 to support Members States in organizing their national-level responses to the GRALE 5 Survey. The regional webinar was helpful to the CSO participants as well in helping them appreciate possible opportunities for their engagement in the country-level survey processes informing GRALE 5. Unfortunately, the country-level GRALE 5 processes offered hardly any spaces for CSOs to participate and contribute. To adapt to this situation, ASPBAE and its members instead undertook the development of Civil Society Spotlight Reports on ALE to offer an alternative CSO perspective on ALE policy and practice. Spotlight Reports were developed in 10 countries in Asia Pacific, the findings of which offered evidence for CSO advocacies in the subsequent processes of CONFINTEA VII at the regional and global levels.

o Being part of the CONFINTEA VII Consultative Committee (CC)

To ensure that all relevant stakeholders are represented in the CONFINTEA VII process, a Consultative Committee (CC) was steered by UIL to provide advice on relevant conceptual and organizational aspects of the conference.

In the main, the CC is a 32-member body consisting of representatives from UNESCO Member States representing all regions (6), the Host Country (1), UN agencies (2), multilateral agencies (7), CSOs (3), Academia (2), UIL Governing Board (2) and UNESCO (9).

In May 2021, ASPBAE was invited by the UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education, Stefania Giannini, to be part of the CONFINTEA VII CC and occupy one of the three (3) CSO seats allocated in this space. These CSO seats were occupied through the representations of ASPBAE, DVV International and the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) which, for decades, have worked closely together in CONFINTEA processes to engage UNESCO, governments and development partners towards ensuring that there will be greater ambition and commitments for adult learning and education (ALE).

Amongst others, being part of the CC offered opportunities to be in strategic discussions from the start of the preparations until the process of producing the zero draft of the Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA) on ALE.

Held against the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, when mobility and travel restrictions were in place, a total of seven (7) virtual Consultative Committee meetings were held, in which ASPBAE actively participated, between July 2021 until May 2022 to guide the preparations and consultations leading to the main conference.

Sub-regional, regional and global consultation processes - where CSOs have also effectively advanced the transformative ALE agenda

At the onset, and as it was in the previous process, it was made clear with and through the CONFINTEA VII CC that the main conference would be preceded by a series of regional preparatory conferences throughout 2021. And, given the opportunities offered by virtual platforms to hold consultations amidst the pandemic, sub-regional consultations were also held, especially in the Asia Pacific region.

ASPBAE actively engaged in and informed the sub-regional and regional CONFINTEA VII Consultations organised by UNESCO-Bangkok, UNESCO Sub-Regional Offices and UIL. For the 4 sub-regional CONFINTEA VII consultations in which ASPBAE participated (in Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific) in 2021, it also organised CSO preparatory meetings to collectively analyse the CONFINTEA VII consultation documents and agenda.

In these processes, ASPBAE was able to gather CSO recommendations and inputs which were presented in the official sub-regional consultations and further developed into a regional CSO position paper which was officially presented and submitted by ASPBAE during the regional CONFINTEA VII consultation on 22 September 2021. ASPBAE's inputs and recommendations were strongly reflected in the contextual analysis and the 9 key recommendations contained in the official regional Outcome Document steered by UNESCO-Bangkok. These were further echoed in the interventions and representations made by ASPBAE in the CONFINTEA VII Consultative Committee at the global level to prepare and inform the CONFINTEA VII documents and processes leading to the main conference in Morocco in June 2022.

\circ Drafting Committee for the new framework for action on ALE

Constituted at the start of the conference, this committee consisted of representatives from UIL Secretariat (2), the host country - Morocco (1), and UNESCO Member States across regions, particular from Togo (1), Austria (1),

Brazil (1), Latvia (1) and South Korea (1). The committee was steered by the Chair of the UIL Governing Board, Daniel Baril. The civil society were part of and have actively influenced the outcomes of the drafting committee deliberations, represented by the ASPBAE Secretary-General (Helen Dabu) and ICAE Secretary-General (Katarina Popovic).

Both ASPBAE and ICAE, carrying the civil society analysis and positions at various levels, contributed directly to strengthening the MFA which was finally approved on the last day of the conference in Marrakech.

It has to be emphasised that the outcome of the CONFINTEA VII, through the MFA, was not only anchored on the work of the drafting committee during the conference, but in all the processes that contributed to this important result. And in all these processes, CSOs at the country level, including ASPBAE members in the Asia Pacific, and in various regions, especially those from ICAE membership, were at the forefront of influencing.

The sub-regional and regional consultations with their corresponding regional outcome documents provided important inputs which were used by Member States and other partners, including CSOs, to improve and strengthen the draft MFA.

The members of CONFINTEA VII Consultative Committee also received an embargoed copy of the preliminary draft MFA in February 2022 with very limited turnaround time to comment and provide inputs. Nevertheless, the CSO representatives – ASPBAE, ICAE and DVVI - and those from the Academia managed to submit a joint and substantive response, analysis and recommendations to improve the draft. At that preliminary point of the document, major improvements were needed on the framing and in elevating the ambition set in the document. The CSO submission was also informed by the various CSO meetings and engagements organised in 2021, especially in shaping the CONFINTEA VII Regional outcome documents, including from the Asia Pacific, to which ASPBAE significantly contributed.

While UIL, which was steering the writing of the draft MFA, adopted many of the CSO inputs, a range of areas still needed improvement in the updated draft that was circulated for public online consultation launched on 3 April 2022 to which the public was invited to provide input and comments until 13th April 2022.

As it has done in the CONFINTEA VII sub-regional and regional consultations in 2021, and to enable wider participation from CSOs in the Asia Pacific, in

informing and responding to the public online consultation on the draft MFA, ASPBAE organised a virtual Regional Meeting on CONFINTEA VII Draft Marrakech Framework for Action on 7th April 2022. This meeting offered a space for ASPBAE and its members to collectively analyse the current state of the draft and put together recommendations that became the basis of ASPBAE's and its members response to the online consultation by UIL. ASPBAE also used the inputs from this consultation to continuously advance the CSO positions and recommendations in the pre-final draft that was circulated to Member States represented in Morocco.

A day before the start of the CONFINTEA VII main conference, on 14th June, ICAE organised a Civil Society (CS) Forum in Marrakech which offered another opportunity to further deliberate and strategise on key CSO positions and advocacies. ASPBAE actively engaged in this CS Forum, including providing analysis and recommendations on the latest draft of the MFA which had become the 'zero draft' sent to Member States and Consultative Committee a day before the start of the conference.

In its input to the CS Forum, ASPBAE particularly highlighted - for the broader CSO constituency at national, regional, and global levels, the areas in the MFA that needed to be protected since these captured what have been advocated for by the CSOs throughout the CONFINTEA VII processes, and the areas that needed to be improved by offering concrete text edits into the main document. Additionally, ASPBAE, through its Secretary-General, was part of the CS Forum Drafting Committee which finalised the Civil Society Manifesto that was delivered by the ICAE Secretary-General on the first day of the main CONFINTEA VII conference on 15th June 2022.

ASPBAE also helped put together the key CSO asks and recommendations to the zero draft of the MFA which was formally submitted to the CONFINTEA VII Consultative Committee and was also used by the CSO delegates from various regions – Asia Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, Middle East and Africa - to engage their government representatives present in the conference.

Propelled by the strong CSO efforts prior to and in the main conference, Member State delegates provided inputs through their representatives to the MFA Drafting Committee which facilitated consensus and also enabled the inclusion of the CSO inputs into the final outcome document.

In terms of the MFA Drafting Committee process, the first meeting which happened on the second day of the conference involved looking at the various submissions and inputs received until that point and finding ways to incorporate these in the zero draft. An updated draft from this process was then shared with the Drafting Committee members in the evening for further deliberation.

The second and last meeting was on the following morning, the last day of the conference, which involved a more rigorous process of: 1) resolving the most contentious parts and issues and; 2) a line-by-line, paragraph-by-paragraph review and agreement by the Drafting Committee members, ensuring all matters had been resolved or that there was a general consensus within the committee on why certain inputs could not be accommodated, and that the overall substance and contents of the document aligned with the overall aspirations set for ALE in the next 12 years.

As has been the case in various global processes for education, financing for ALE, including through the CONFINTEA VII MFA, was a key area that merited a lengthy deliberation by the Drafting Committee. While the final outcome document rallied Member States for a commitment to increase public funding for ALE, prevent regression on existing ALE budgets, and re-affirmed the currently agreed commitments for education financing, the Drafting Committee, stopped short at mentioning a concrete path to increasing domestic resources for education, including ALE, by widening the tax base. Some Drafting Committee members did not feel confident in tackling tax systems in such a global framework document as they were of the view that the issue falls within the sovereign powers of countries. And while it was countered that this sustainable path to domestic resources for education has been reflected in the Education 2030 Framework for Action, the consensus safely fell back to the more familiar commitments for financing.

Another area which drew some further deliberations revolved around international cooperation for enactment and monitoring. Substantive efforts by CSOs were exerted to ensure that UNESCO, through UIL, would continue to play a critical role in steering the reporting and monitoring process for the MFA. Emphasis was also put to ensure strong country-level engagements in the follow-up and monitoring, and for the effective and participatory implementation of the recommendations of the Framework.

Once the key contentious areas had been deliberated, the process of going through the rest of the document, through a line-by-line, paragraph-by-paragraph review, went through quickly with only some editorial clean up and tightening needed to be done. But even in this process, the CSO representation in the Drafting Committee made sure not only to protect those areas that were

advanced and embedded by CSOs through the various consultative processes, but also ensured that they were correctly and logically expressed in the final document in this finessing process by the Committee.

The final document reviewed and agreed by the Drafting Committee was then circulated to the Member States in the afternoon of the last day and was then formally adopted by acclamation by the delegates.

Post-Marrakech: The CONFINTEA VII Follow-Up Meeting in Asia in 2023

On 30th May 2023, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) and UNESCO Multisectoral Regional Offices in Bangkok, Beijing, Jakarta and New Delhi, organised a virtual Regional CONFINTEA VII Follow-up Conference for Asia as part of their efforts to pursue the commitments made in CONFINTEA VII codified through the MFA.

This regional inter-governmental conference offered an important step within the region to both engage governments in the Asia Pacific to expand dissemination efforts on the CONFINTEA VII commitments, and to also concretise these by identifying action points made in the MFA with a focus on policies, funding, provision and quality and governance, as well as monitoring and evaluation. The follow-up mechanism was also discussed at the preliminary stage to track progress to be made and exchange good practices within the region.

ASPBAE, as an organizing partner for this regional conference pursuing the CONFINTEA VII outcomes, presented the "Civil Society Recommendations in the Implementation and Monitoring of CONFINTEA VII Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA)" within the plenary session which featured other stakeholders' perspectives governments and on the MFA implementation, including priority areas and good practices in the region. More than 60 participants from governments in the region, UNESCO subregional offices and various stakeholders, including civil society organisations (CSOs) represented by ASPBAE and some of its members, and representatives from DVV International Southeast Asia Office, attended this virtual regional conference.

As part of ASPBAE's practice to ensure that its input to this regional process reflected the perspectives and recommendations of CSOs, especially its members in the Asia Pacific region, it organised a virtual preparatory CSO consultative meeting on 23rd May 2023. This meeting brought together representatives from ASPBAE's membership consisting of ALE advocates and

practitioners from countries in South Asia, South East Asia, East Asia and Central Asia. The outcomes of this CSO consultative meeting along with the CSO Spotlight reports on ALE developed by ASPBAE members at the country level were put together into a summary recommendations paper presented by the ASPBAE Secretary-General in the main intergovernmental regional conference on 30th May and was also submitted in writing to UIL and UNESCO Multi-Sectoral Offices in the region.

In the main, ASPBAE's recommendations in the pursuit of CONFINTEA VII MFA commitments in the Asia Pacific revolved around the key areas of national ALE policy and financing; equity and inclusion; ALE and digital equity, literacy and citizenship; quality delivery and provisioning of ALE; ALE governance and systems; monitoring and accountability mechanisms of the MFA and; promoting good practices from countries within the Asia Pacific.

Amongst others, ASPBAE emphasized that governments must enact a comprehensive legislation and policy on ALE as a right within the lifelong learning framework, with the participation of civil society and other ALE stakeholders. The national law should be followed with clear implementation rules and guidelines, defining specific roles of the national and local governments and with categorical policy on annual budget allocation from the national or central government.

ASPBAE also urged governments to address the massive financing gap for ALE by increasing and allocating public funding to the development, implementation, and monitoring of ALE policies, plans, and programmes that cater to the learning needs of all learners, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable groups. In this regard, governments should allocate at least 4-6 % of GDP and/or at least 15-20% of total public expenditure to education as already affirmed both in the Education 2030 Framework for Action and the Marrakech Framework for Action on ALE. It reiterated the CSO call even in CONFINTEA VI (Belem) for countries to allocate at least 6% of the national education budget to ALE with at least 3% dedicated to adult literacy in countries where high levels of illiteracy persist. ASPBAE also urged developed countries to fulfil their commitments to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP) for ODA to developing countries.

Strengthening the equity lens of government responsibilities to deliver ALE, there is a need to prioritize and target special population groups who are diverse, complex, marginalized, minorities, youth and adults with special needs and adapt instructions as per their learning needs. Underserved and vulnerable population groups should always be prioritized in ALE by

delivering inclusive ALE programmes in partnership with CSOs that are at the forefront of ALE provisioning in grassroots communities.

At the ground level, there is need for countries to urgently support and finance community learning centres. Learners, parents, family members, and communities must have access to community-based learning, gender-just skills education, family literacy programmes, reading centres, and other programmes that foster intergenerational learning and support the continuity of learning, especially on mental health, food and nutrition and community resilience efforts.

Cognisant of the accelerated pace towards digitalisation in many countries in the region, ASPBAE highlighted that education systems should set into motion affirmative actions toward ensuring access to multilingual education and digital literacy for families, especially in remote rural areas and other marginalised communities.

Further, to ensure CONFINTEA VII MFA commitments are pursued, ASPBAE called for a wider information dissemination campaign from local to national levels about the state of ALE at the country level, and the need to start a country and multi-stakeholder process of developing an Action Plan for ALE and the implementation of the MFA where clear country targets, financing and indicators for monitoring progress are defined. This should ensure the participation of CSOs and other key stakeholders in defining priority areas and action plans. To reach out and achieve wider support, the MFA and country action should be translated into the country's language. Capacity building of local governments, CSOs and other stakeholders on concretising the MFA into policies, financing and programmes will also be critical in the coming period.

Finally, ASPBAE emphasised that issues such as climate change, migration and refugee crisis, conflict and disasters need international cooperation. It therefore urged Member States to define a regional ALE agenda with clear cooperation plans that will provide learning and opportunities in conflict-affected countries, Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries.

As CONFINTEA VII follow-up efforts have only just begun in the Asia Pacific, ASPBAE, together with its members, affirmed its commitment to sustain its active engagement and contribution in these processes. It will continue to work with national, regional and global CSO formations, including through the wide network of ICAE, to advocate for a more ambitious, gender-just, climate-saving and inclusive ALE agenda through the Marrakech Framework for Action.

Final reflections for the next CONFINTEA

Considering the challenges posed by the pandemic in going through all the CONFINTEA VII processes, especially in virtual and blended mode of engagements, there was much to celebrate in the way the civil society successfully engaged in and influenced the outcomes. These need to be recognized, sustained and protected at all levels.

Building on these strong efforts of CSOs to sustain support for ALE, both in practice and policy, more advocacy strategising needs to be set in place to ensure governments will have a more pro-active role, ownership and involvement in charting the follow-up and monitoring mechanisms even at the start of the process of shaping the new framework. Not fully concretising this area at the onset and in the main document might risk leaving the follow-up process to be ambiguous and dependent on who and what entity takes over.

Further, the battle for the sustainability of ALE delivery and implementation at the country level, to truly deliver the right to ALE within a lifelong learning framework, will continue to be dependent on strong and concrete public funding guaranteed by governments, especially in protecting the interest of those on the margins. Civil society should neither concede this advocacy nor leave it to other stakeholders, especially the private sector, to define this important agenda for ALE.

Finally, much learning and strategising need to be set in place on virtual modes of engagements especially in shaping transnational agreements on education, including ALE. Recognising that there is no turning back to the previous norm where key agreements are shaped and defined through rigorous face-to-face modes of discussions and negotiations, working procedures for a mix of modalities need to be reshaped and improved in such a way that does not sacrifice the time and substantive quality of consultations and engagements, and ensuring that the final outcomes remain true to the representative voice of delegates and partners for CONFINTEA.

There is no doubt that the context in 12 years' time will be much changed, driven by further acceleration in technology, climate change, geopolitical dynamics, wars and conflicts, and persistent inequalities. This will necessitate important processes like CONFINTEA to continue to adapt, to be connected to grassroots and country-level challenges, and to hold its value in contributing to a more equal and just society. CONFINTEA VII's outcome through the MFA ultimately laid the ground for what is expected now and in the next process –

that is, to fully harness the transformational power of adult learning and education.

Where to Next in the Asia Pacific and Beyond: ASPBAE's Journey with ICAE and Partners in Informing and Following Up on CONFINTEA VII Marrakech Framework for Action

Helen Dabu

Abstract

Strategic efforts at all levels were exerted by the civil society organisations (CSOs), particularly members of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) including ASPBAE, in substantially informing the processes and outcomes of CONFINTEA VII as codified through the Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA). This commitment and influencing efforts were notable in the CSOs' ability to mobilise and urgently respond to those processes shaping the outcomes, especially as they were adapted to a pandemic context in which the majority of the inter-governmental processes leading to the face-to-face main conference in Marrakech were conducted virtually. As a lesson-learning piece, it is important to document these efforts not only to serve as a reference for the next CONFINTEA process in 12 years, but also to guide the frontline advocates for adult learning and education (ALE) on the strategic areas to monitor in following-up the MFA commitments to fully harness the transformational power of ALE.

Keywords

ALE advocacy, CSO commitment, CONFINTEA VII follow-up, Marrakech Framework for Action, transformational ALE.

Próximos pasos en Asia-Pacífico y más allá: El viaje de la ASPBAE con el ICAE y sus socios para informar y dar seguimiento al Marco de Acción de Marrakech de la CONFINTEA VII

Helen Dabu

Resumen

Las organizaciones de la sociedad civil (OSC), en particular los miembros del Consejo Internacional de Educación de Adultos (CIEA), incluida la ASPBAE, llevaron a cabo esfuerzos estratégicos en todos los niveles para informar de manera sustancial los procesos y resultados de la CONFINTEA VII, tal como se reflejan en el Marco de Acción de Marrakech. Este compromiso y los esfuerzos de influencia fueron notables en la capacidad de las OSC para movilizarse y responder de manera urgente a los procesos que dieron forma a los resultados, especialmente dado que se adaptaron a un contexto pandémico en el que la mayoría de los procesos intergubernamentales que condujeron a la conferencia principal presencial de Marrakech se llevaron a cabo virtualmente. Como lección aprendida, es importante

documentar estos esfuerzos no solo para que sirvan de referencia en el próximo proceso de CONFINTEA dentro de 12 años, sino también para guiar a los promotores de primera línea del aprendizaje y la educación de adultos (AEA) sobre las áreas estratégicas que deben monitorear en el seguimiento de los compromisos del MAAM para aprovechar plenamente el poder transformador del AEA.

Palabras clave

Promoción del AEA, compromiso de las OSC, seguimiento de la CONFINTEA VII, Marco de Acción de Marrakech, AEA transformador.

Prochaine étape dans la région Asie-Pacifique et au-delà : Le parcours de l'ASPBAE avec le CIEA et ses partenaires dans l'information et le suivi du Cadre d'action de Marrakech de CONFINTEA VII

Helen Dabu

Résumé

Les organisations de la société civile (OSC), en particulier les membres du Conseil international d'éducation des adultes (CIEA), dont l'ASPBAE, ont déployé des efforts stratégiques à tous les niveaux pour informer de manière substantielle les processus et les résultats de la CONFINTEA VII tels que codifiés dans le Cadre d'action de Marrakech (CAM). Cet engagement et ces efforts d'influence ont été remarquables dans la capacité des OSC à se mobiliser et à répondre d'urgence à ces processus qui ont façonné les résultats, d'autant plus qu'ils étaient adaptés à un contexte de pandémie dans lequel la majorité des processus intergouvernementaux menant à la conférence principale de Marrakech se sont déroulés virtuellement. En tant qu'élément d'apprentissage, il est important de documenter ces efforts non seulement pour servir de référence au prochain processus CONFINTEA dans 12 ans, mais aussi pour guider les défenseurs de première ligne de l'apprentissage et de l'éducation des adultes (ALE) sur les domaines stratégiques à surveiller dans le cadre du suivi des engagements du MAE pour exploiter pleinement le pouvoir de transformation de l'ALE.

Mots clés

Plaidoyer pour l'EFA, engagement des OSC, suivi de la CONFINTEA VII, Cadre d'action de Marrakech, ALE transformationnelle.