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As president of the International Council for Adult Education, I need first, on behalf of the world community of adult learners and educators to congratulate the DVV for what you represent in the world today, for your achievement and leadership in the promotion of the right to learn throughout the adult life. Every year, nearly 10 million adults in Germany could through the Adult Education Centers, the FHS, exercise their right to learn on a self-determined basis.

The FHS, are popular universities through their large and diversified public as well as through their vision of learning answering the real need of people in health, in language training, in all the arts, in environmental issues, to introduce themselves the new technologies or to master basic literacy and numeracy . You have resisted against falling in a reductionist vision of adult education.

I need to congratulate the DVV and the FHS also for your unique international solidarity, supporting adult education movements, networks and organizations on all continents, from Asia to Africa, from Latin America to the Arab world, not forgetting Central and Eastern Europe. You are giving our Council, ICAE, a steady support in order for us and our members to pursue our advocacy mission at global and regional levels for the rights to learn of all adult wherever they live on this planet. You are thus helping creating space for South-South, East-West and North-South cooperation.

Three challenges

I see in your prospective paper three challenges facing the adult education networks all around the world. **Accessibility** is the first challenge. In the world of rapid changes in people's life course on all continent, each and all citizens should have the opportunity to develop themselves throughout their life at whatever age, to acquire the knowledge and know-how to better pilot their life transition, to improve their quality of life, to develop their potential , to experience the joy of learning. In that perspective, no area of learning should be left behind. The FHS have created over the years an open and friendly public image of adult learning, an image that has made it possible for so many women and men to cross over the door of your center every week and feel there at home, in spite of strong apprehension of any formal education institution.

In that context, the rise of fees to attend evening courses is becoming a huge issue all over the world, because it can silently but deeply transform adult education participation in so many countries, Norway, Finland, England, Canada, Netherland and possibly Germany. Hence the second challenge: the **financial factor**. Research has demonstrated again and again the adult education provision on pure market logic tends to reproduce the inequality constructed through initial formal education. The financial factors has two effects: one direct of closing the door of adult education centers to number of adults and in particular those have less resources, and a second indirect effect that I would call the 'substitution function.' I mean by this substitution function' this serious risk of slowly replacing freely chosen learning activities by obligatory employability courses because they are paid entirely by Employment ministries, the danger of replacing open cultural or health related activities by expensive exclusive activities.

Of course work-related adult education and training activities have a key role to play both for the economy and for the people searching to exercise their right to work. And we have policies and institutions and mechanisms to that end. The issue is to protect the budget and the resources for non-work-related adult learning. The issue is not to save the adult education centers by silently and inadvertently shifting their programming and their public.

The general adult education, the popular or community education, what the Nordic countries called Oplysning, enlightenment or Folkbildning, is not an expense, but an **investment** giving high return. This is my third challenge; general adult education is not a luxury or a generosity of government in period of affluence, but a **necessity**.

The third challenge is to demonstrate **the benefit of general adult education** in the various domains of human activity. We have to get evidence on the benefit of enhancing people health competency: through prevention effect, it reduces the occurrence of illness and hence the demand for health care, as that was shown on the African continent over the last five years, when the HIV-SIDA pandemic has been significantly reduced through intensive health information, education and communication (IEC) interventions. Similarly, increased health literacy within a population makes it possible to maintain the quality of health care while reducing the time of medical visit. Indeed health related popular education is one of the greatest factor of productivity of our health welfare system by making its emerging participatory approach realistic not for a few but for all.

We have also to collect factual evidence on the improvement of school achievement of children through parental education and the direct effect of parent participation in general adult education: an effect being produced not only through the increased mentoring capacity of parents, but also by creating a positive image of education within the immediate family culture. We have to produce evidence also on the impact of an increased participation of the aging population in adult education: impact on the autonomy thus gained by the seniors thus becoming less dependent on social services, but also and even more important the quality of life of the whole community.

The same is true on the effect of popular or general education and consequently of FHS on environmental consciousness and the vitality of civil society.

Yes popular or general education should not be traded off. It is one of the best investment governments can make to sustain an efficient thus participatory welfare state. It is an investment yielding unmistakable returns, but we have to demonstrate it to all our decision-makers. By supporting general adult education and making it accessible to all, we build an inclusive learning society which will yield results in all areas of activities, including the economy and the world of work. It is a concrete recognition of the human dignity and creativity of all woman and man, whenever the level of formal schooling.