

DG/2004/105
Original: English

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
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(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the 5th meeting of the Working Group on EFA

UNESCO, 20 July 2004

Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by extending to you all a warm welcome to UNESCO and to the fifth meeting of the Working Group on Education for All (EFA). Let me also welcome back Sir John Daniel, the former Assistant Director-General for Education, and thank him for accepting my request to return to Paris and chair this meeting of the Working Group. Sir John (which I now feel free to call him since he is no longer a UNESCO staff member) has made important contributions to EFA and no doubt in his new capacity he will continue to do so. I am sure we all wish him well in his new role as President and Chief Executive Officer of The Commonwealth of Learning.

Since its first meeting in November 2001, the Working Group has gradually established a strong identity among EFA international partners and Member States. It has demonstrated its ability to provide guidance on technical matters as well as to take account of the outcomes of the preceding meeting of the High-Level Group and to prepare for its next meeting. This strengthening of the Working Group has been made possible through professionally well-prepared and effective meetings, which have benefited from wider consultation with and better participation of key partners.

I am particularly glad to note the increasing interest of the international community in EFA, as shown by the growing participation in this meeting, especially of representatives of developing countries and civil society. I am encouraged by the positive feedback on the last meeting of the Working Group in July 2003 and the increasing number of requests for participation in this present meeting.

It is also heartening to note the growing spirit of collaboration evident among EFA partners in the preparation of the meeting of the Working Group and during the meeting itself. As one can observe, the Working Group is becoming a hub for other multi-stakeholder EFA-related meetings and activities. A series of EFA meetings has been planned to take place this week around the Working Group, taking advantage of the presence of many EFA partners. This is the case for the meetings of the FTI Steering Group, the MDG Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, the United Nations Literacy Decade International Resource Persons Team Meeting, and the Round Table on Emergency Education.

This fifth meeting will address a number of cross-cutting issues raised in the third meeting of the High-Level Group in New Delhi, India, namely, the quality of data and statistics for monitoring progress towards EFA; external funding for EFA in light of recent developments of the Fast-Track Initiative (FTI); civil society engagement in EFA in the post-Dakar period; and partnership with the private sector on EFA. A session will also be devoted to the presentation and discussion of the Interim Report on Achieving the Millennium Development Goal of Universal

Primary Education. This will provide an opportunity for the Working Group to contribute to the Millennium Review of MDGs in 2005. This agenda, along with the participation of all major EFA constituencies, will provide effective linkages between the work of this Group, the High-Level Group and the FTI Partners Group.

The question of data and statistics for monitoring progress towards EFA has been at the centre of international debates following the launch of the *Global Monitoring Report* and especially since last year's meeting of the High-Level Group in New Delhi. In view of the growing demand for global monitoring, especially in regard to the MDGs and the EFA goals, the production of internationally comparable, good quality EFA statistics that are up-to-date, accurate and reliable is proving to be a big challenge that needs to be addressed collectively, particularly for the benefit of countries with weak statistical systems.

The New Delhi Communiqué underlined the need for the international funding and technical assistance agencies to fulfil the commitments they made at Dakar and Monterrey. In particular, the High-Level Group meeting last year in New Delhi called for “a clear framework to improve the effectiveness of the FTI and to mobilize resources for endorsed countries.”

The subsequent FTI Donors Group meeting held in Oslo, Norway, on 20-22 November 2003, responded by calling for the following three actions: first, the extension of the FTI to all low-income countries; second, the establishment of a multi-donor Catalytic Fund to assist those FTI countries that do not have an adequate donor presence; and, third, the setting up of a Facility for Programme Preparation to assist countries without an education sector plan to prepare one.

It is vital that the Working Group appreciates the implications of the new FTI framework and explores ways to improve the FTI's effectiveness in mobilizing resources for EFA. At the same time, we have to continue our joint efforts to explore new funding initiatives, particularly for non-FTI countries.

I am pleased to see the increasing participation of civil society in EFA. This meeting provides us with a good opportunity to reflect upon this important trend since Dakar. In addition, we must seek to identify areas in which we can do better at the global level as well as the country level, especially where NGOs are still denied their legitimate role and place in contributing to EFA.

Here I should make a special mention of the annual EFA Action Week, which is going from strength to strength in raising awareness of the importance of EFA. It is an excellent example of the joint efforts of the Global Campaign for Education, UNESCO and other partners. Advance planning is in hand for the organization of the

2005 EFA Action Week, whose aim will be to focus attention on the imminent goal of gender parity in primary education.

The Dakar Framework for Action, in paragraphs 10 and 46, underlined the need for broadening the partnerships in EFA to include the private sector. This meeting offers an opportunity to bring together international expertise to discuss conceptual issues and problems as well as the potential for enhanced private sector partnerships and alliances in education, especially EFA. I appreciate the efforts of USAID in stimulating and preparing the session. We should build on its outcomes in the future.

You will note that we have included a brief session on “Strategies for the future” to encourage all partners to assume shared responsibilities and tasks to follow up the deliberations of this meeting. We shall seek to do this not through new mechanisms but by using a ‘light’, flexible and informal consultation process to address emerging issues.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me take this opportunity to update you about a process that UNESCO is presently undertaking. On the request of the Executive Board at its 169th session last April, UNESCO is currently conducting a Strategic Review of its post-Dakar role in EFA. UNESCO sees this exercise as an opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of its lead coordination role in EFA, notably in developing the use of the Working Group and the High-Level Group to ensure that all partners are basically working towards a shared set of goals in a coherent, consistent and constructive manner. This is particularly relevant when EFA partners, including UNESCO, are required to play a subsidiary or contributory role in international initiatives and EFA flagships.

We have been working intensively during the past two months on the Strategic Review and, early last week, I provided an interim report when I spoke to the delegations of our Member States. Copies of my speech have been made available to participants in this meeting. The initial reaction I received was positive and encouraging. The final version of my report will be completed shortly, in readiness for its presentation to the next meeting of the Executive Board in the autumn.

My hope and my intention is that this Strategic Review will strengthen our collaboration with our EFA partners, namely, developing countries, donors, multilateral agencies and civil society organizations. While the operation of the coordination mechanisms and their effective linkage are a core concern, so too is the need to contribute more to EFA advocacy, to EFA debates at international, regional and national levels, and to the mobilization of national efforts and international support. In addition, we shall be looking at our own programming with a view to pushing for stronger action by UNESCO in such areas as literacy, teacher training,

HIV/AIDS prevention education and quality. But we are clear that our enhanced efforts require partnerships and support if they are to succeed.

To this end, it is important that we engage in active dialogue with our multilateral EFA partners and our civil society partners concerning the direction that the Strategic Review is taking us. We welcome your advice and we need your feedback. Tomorrow afternoon, UNESCO's Deputy Director-General, Marcio Barbosa, who has been chairing the UNESCO Task Force on the EFA Strategic Review, will begin to elicit your responses. The views of the different EFA constituencies are important for us in order to understand your expectations, therefore let us have your reactions so that we can better serve the whole EFA movement.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It remains for me to wish you a rewarding and constructive meeting during the next two days. I look forward to the outcomes of this meeting with keen interest. Thank you.