

**“BUILDING A HEALTHY KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY THROUGH  
INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT”**

**Nomura Centre for Lifelong Integrated Education  
The Commemorative Ceremony and Celebration  
Of**

**The 50th Anniversary of Foundation  
Sunday, March 4th, 2012  
Hotel Okura Tokyo**

**Address by**

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It is a great honour for me to join you in this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the foundation of the Nomura Center for Lifelong Integrated Education. This is an important occasion for collective reflection on what lessons could be drawn from the initiative of a visionary leader in the person of Mrs. Nomura in building a harmonious society.

Today, the world is changing rapidly and learning to understand it requires greater pragmatism in terms of areas of knowledge. In my presentation I would draw from two perspectives that are mutually inclusive in responding to managing change in our environment and human development. I refer to the opportunities that education offers, namely a paradigm shift through early child development and family literacy. I would like to share with you several examples of practical interventions in Africa and I will then conclude with proposals on how this shift in paradigm could bring about greater peace and well being of the general population in most countries in Africa.

The development indicators for the continent continue to show rather slow progress despite much optimism in economic trends in recent years. During the recent World Economic Forum, Africa was quoted as a continent which has recorded steady economic growth despite the financial crisis. A common sense analysis of the situation could be drawn from the view that 'he that is down needs fear no fall', so while most countries known for record high growth experience a steep fall, African governments seem not to be affected.

This forum is an opportunity to share the situation of Africa at the countdown to 2015, which is the target date for two important development agendas, the Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It's an important moment to consider the lingering and new challenges the continent faces in trying to be responsive to the needs of children, youth and adults.

Most countries in Africa have not been able to significantly achieve neither the EFA nor the MDG targets. In my view perhaps there is a need to examine the role that integrated lifelong learning approach plays in achieving EFA and MDGs and the creation of healthy learning societies.

I believe African governments need to make a shift and put higher investments in Early Childhood Development (ECD) and family literacy. A good start in life is recognized as being one of the main determinants for childhood survival, early grade reading for success in school and beyond. The shift in paradigm will have to seriously embrace the important approach of intergenerational learning for effective human development, learning outcomes and success in life to end the vicious cycle of intergeneration poverty. Educational issues will be addressed from a life cycle perspective which spans the period from the womb and cradle through to the grave.

In Africa there are a number of interesting lessons to draw from and the concept of the Nomura integrated learning serves as a good one to start from. The African education systems continue to face many serious challenges associated with curricula, teachers, teaching and

learning, financing and systemic capacity which ultimately affect learning outcomes of the children thus posing many difficulties in making the link between increased investments in education and high economic rates of returns. Despite irrefutable evidence generated from educational research and the centrality of the child in the educational process, the practical application in classroom practice remains elusive. Consequently breaking the cycle of poverty remains a big challenge especially from marginalized or rural populations.

International evidence and research support the notion that poverty, just as assets, are passed on from parents to children. The negative loop of parent-child poverty is frequently labeled intergenerational transmission of poverty (ITP). A simplified view of this model depicts poor parents who begin childbearing early, and who do not have the means to provide for their children's upbringing. We know that children with no access to formal or non-formal education and training lack survival and marketable skills. They will generally socialize with other youth in the same social milieu, often resulting in unacceptable social behaviours and dire consequences, including early childbearing thus perpetuating the cycle of intergenerational poverty and illiteracy. The failure of the system can be viewed from several dimensions:

- Failure to provide adult training for young parents and thus failure of addressing the functional poverty of the parents;
- Failure to provide early childhood programmes to help the child's psychological and physical development;
- Failure to compensate direct and opportunity costs for children's education and thus failure of ensuring basic schooling for all children;
- Failure to provide non-formal training for the unschooled youth
- Failure to invest in adult literacy and education in most cases to deal with intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Family functional literacy programs could contribute to a number of short-term effects including (i) better child-rearing (better

understanding of children's needs, better communication and follow-up during children's informal and formal educational processes); (ii) improved family health (better awareness of nutritional and hygiene issues) and improvement of adult functional skills. (iii) greater awareness of the basic values to be espoused and shared within the family and the community at large. It is important to underscore the important role of the family as the first teacher who imparts not only knowledge but skills and values to the child before and during the period of schooling.

This paradigm shift in the system of education which caters to a less fragmented education system must also ensure that initial teaching or instruction should be conducted in the national language or mother tongue to ensure higher absorption rates of concepts, knowledge, skills and values. It should also ensure that learning begins from conception to incorporate fully early childhood segment (0-8) in a perspective of life long learning. This approach will have implications for several components of the education systems and educational practice.

In Africa this discourse is on going and there are a number of initiatives taken by different actors. For the purpose of this presentation I would confine myself to share a very interesting initiative where, UNESCO, in partnership ADEA and the household name publisher Michel Lafon Education, developed a series called "*Childhoods Cultures*" involving 2 African young children "*Bouba and Zaza*" as actors. Though specifically designed for the young age audiences (3-8), it targets all actors directly or indirectly in charge of child care and education i.e. parents, siblings and other family members, communities, schools.

It is an example of fostering intergenerational learning through the ***Bouba and Zaza collection*** which freely examines serious subjects made simple for the consumption of children and adults alike. Its stories are set in contemporary society and portray basic education including early childhood and its problems. For example some of the

topics include breaking with the secrecy and silence that go hand in hand with AIDS, the damage caused by those who violate the physical integrity of children, fighting the disaster caused by climate change and sustainable development, water and planet, peace and protection, and, war-induced trauma. The ***Bouba and Zaza series*** is a simple illustration to facilitate education through intergenerational learning and exchange.

To conclude, let me emphasize that where governments, financial and technical partners and civil society actors revisit the investment patterns for education through embracing a dual focus on family literacy for better parenting practices and increased investments in ECD the outcome of education systems would have greater impact for economic growth and sustainable development thus ensuring peace and harmonious societies.

Education cannot be provided in piecemeal giving way to making choices and preferences for one level over another as is generally the case where poverty and low economic growth rates forces these artificial separations and choices. Breaking the cycle of poverty requires hard choices to prioritise a holistic approach for human development as opposed to the huge focus given to economic growth for human development. Human development will drive economic growth and not the other way round and which has directly or indirectly led to the chaos in society, the environment and financial markets. The road not always taken could lead us to the truth. Intergenerational learning and ECD could be that road.

Thank you for your kind attention