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Организация
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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Education for All up to 2015 and Beyond Consultation summary: International NGOs

October 2012



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Background paper prepared for the
Sixth Meeting of UNESCO's Collective Consultation
of NGOs on Education for All (CCNGO/EFA)

by

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October 2012

This paper was prepared as background information for the Sixth Meeting of UNESCO's Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education for All (CCNGO/EFA). It has not been edited by UNESCO. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to UNESCO. The paper can be cited with the following reference: "Background paper prepared for the Sixth Meeting of UNESCO's Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education for All (CCNGO/EFA)" For further information, please contact ccngo-efa@unesco.org.

Education for All up to 2015 and Beyond

Consultation summary: International NGOs

1. Introduction

In preparation for the 6th Meeting of the Collective Consultation of Non-Governmental Organizations on Education for All (CCNGO/EFA) (24 to 26 October 2012 in Paris), the CCNGO/EFA Ad Hoc Group, with the support of the UNESCO Secretariat, carried out a consultation of all member NGOs of the global CCNGO/EFA network to feed into the process of defining the necessary measures to scale up progress towards 2015 and the post-2015 education and development agendas.

As we approach the target date set for the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), there is a growing momentum among diverse development stakeholders to look beyond the EFA and the MDGs in order to shape the international education development agenda beyond 2015. As UNESCO's key mechanism for dialogue, reflection and partnership with civil society organizations in the framework of the EFA movement, the CCNGO/EFA is one such stakeholder. A better understanding of current actions undertaken by NGOs to influence the post-2015 agenda will be useful to inform the discussions during the 6th CCNGO/EFA meeting and determine how UNESCO and the CCNGO/EFA should be positioned in this dynamic.

This report summarizes the responses from international NGOs that are members of the CCNGO/EFA.

2. Reaching EFA goals by 2015

Since the adoption of the EFA goals in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000, significant progress has been made especially in increasing enrolment and reducing gender disparities at the primary level. Progress has, however, been uneven both between and within countries and in some cases it has started to wane. Advances made in access have often hidden persistent and significant challenges in other areas, notably the quality and relevance of education, and its availability, particularly for adults, and for the most marginalised. Many countries are not on track to meeting the international goals for education by 2015. In order to accelerate progress towards EFA, successful policies and practices need to be identified and shared to allow others to replicate them as appropriate.

2.1 Bottlenecks slowing down EFA progress

The global financial crisis since 2008 has highlighted the lack of many governments' commitment to put education high enough on their agendas; linked to this, donors have failed

to deliver commitments made. There has been a resultant shortage of resources needed to achieve the EFA goals in full. The result is a widening gap between rhetoric and practice in too many places.

The multi-dimensional impact of poverty, and rising inequality within and between states have a major impact on educational access and progression. It is hard for the parents of the very poorest children to engage in dialogue with the education system.

It has been most challenging to secure EFA goals for learners living in fragile states, subject to natural disasters, or living in areas subject to persistent conflict.

The adoption of two EFA goals as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) marginalized the other four EFA goals, making them harder to achieve – most notably affecting adult literacy. The overwhelming focus on universal primary education has led many middle and high income states to consider, erroneously, that EFA was irrelevant for them, to the detriment of the rest of the EFA goals.

Teacher training and capacity – key factors in success – has received too little attention. Related to this there has been inadequate attention to the quality of education. Equity has been insufficiently prioritized. As a result resources have not been marshaled to reach the most marginalized.

Gender inequality persists, as can be seen by the fact that twice as many women as men continue to lack literacy. Too little attention has been paid to the needs of disabled learners, or of those with specific and additional learning needs. The impact of homophobia on access and retention has not been adequately addressed.

Respondents also cited the following bottlenecks: poor facilities; poor budget management; a lack of transparency; a failure to recognize the challenges posed by cultural diversity; the need for mother tongue language learning; for improvements in access to and the use of ICTs, and of open and distance learning technologies; and the failure adequately to engage the private sector.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, and despite the welcome dialogue between CSOs and UNESCO, CSOs believe that progress towards achievement of the goals would be dramatically improved with more effective dialogue between government, CSOs, learners and their parents.

2.2 Policies and practices that have been successful with regard to progress towards the achievement of EFA goals

The greatest successes to date derive from the way the EFA targets have provided a focus for coordinated investment (especially in relation to universal primary schooling), and from the creation of an accountability framework.

The EFA goals have also put education higher on the global education agenda (though that impact is not seen in all member states), and have through the publication of monitoring data, and the active engagement of civil society organisations in the EFA process, provided the conditions for more effective public advocacy to defend the right to education, and to shine a light on the gap between rhetoric and practice.

The adoption of the EFA goals, and the acceptance of two goals into the MDGs have led to dramatic improvements in the numbers of children in primary school, although 61 million remain unreached, there are concerns about the quality of much provision, and progress to the achievement of this and other goals has slowed since the 2008 financial crises.

There has also been progress in securing gender equity in participation in primary schools; but major cultural challenges persist in securing equality of outcomes, and securing equal opportunities for older girls and for women.

EFA has had a positive impact, too, in fragile states, because of the concentration of resources poured in for educational activity.

Respondents pointed to the legislative gains made, for example in India where the right of children to free, compulsory schooling has been enshrined in law, as was the right to literacy.

The respondents also highlighted the impact of effective advocacy for EFA on local practice in different countries: in girls' access to education (Mozambique); in the School in a Box initiative in early childhood education (Philippines); adult literacy programme (Egypt); and in the Dutch government's approach to rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender learners through its GALE project.

Individual respondents pointed to specific gains in the use of mother tongue as the medium for instruction; to wider understanding of the needs of dyslexic learners; to confidence building outreach programmes like the 'bibliothèques de la rue' (which offer context specific programmes engaging educators, parents and children); to open and distance education initiatives which engage higher education institutions in supporting the achievement of EFA goals; and to the cross-cutting co-ordination offered in Mexico through the work of Red Co-op Interinstitucional.

A number of responses reinforced the point that gains often happened where CSO pressure helped to turn enlightened policy aspirations into practical programmes backed by resources.

3. Actions to be taken by UNESCO in the run-up to 2015 in terms of EFA coordination and in terms of its collaboration with the civil society

In Autumn 2011, UNESCO's Executive Board endorsed the UNESCO Director-General's decision to renew the global EFA coordination mechanism in order to enhance efficiency and speed up the progress towards the achievement of the EFA goals¹.

In terms of EFA coordination and UNESCO's collaboration with the civil society between now and 2015, the respondents thought that UNESCO should:

- Promote a holistic approach to developing solutions from a macro-perspective and consequently seek a meaningful leadership as well as real and extensive collaboration to reach this end;
- Promote a broadened vision of education by developing and recognizing non-traditional forms, in particular those forms meaningful to marginalised populations.
- Build capacity to ensure that financial, technological and human resources are utilized in the best possible way;
- Schedule specific deliverables coupled with risk logs for between now and 2015;
- Ask for more frequent evaluation feedback in order to become more reactive on successes and difficulties;
- Ensure effective monitoring mechanisms in the post-2015 agenda;
- Put the right to education, children's rights, inequity issues, and the right to mother tongue instruction high on the education agenda;
- Identify champion countries and new/existing organizations to drive momentum in the run-up to 2015, with a particular focus on emerging countries;
- Support champions at the senior level within each category of stakeholders;
- Develop communication and marketing strategies to encourage the uptake of education and continue to rally international and government support to pursue EFA;
- Make clear reference to the potential and actual contribution of all stakeholders, including the higher education sector, in the achievement of EFA in its portals, international instruments, and publications;
- Organize dialogue between the higher education sector, teacher training centers, ministries, and teachers to promote education innovation, such as research-based teaching and open and distance learning;
- Include grassroots associations, teachers, and local populations, particularly the poorest and most marginalised, in political processes of defining educational policies at the national/international levels, including the post-2015 agenda, and to develop appropriate communication channels to this means;
- Allocate funds for thematic consultations and focus groups to be awarded to NGOs for carrying out grassroots assessments of EFA that can feed into UNESCO programmes and policies and encourage national commissions to work with NGOs;

¹ For more information about the mechanism, see 'Information note on the reform of UNESCO's global EFA coordination mechanism' <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002168/216834E.pdf>.

- Identify and reinforce capacities of key local NGOs to help improve their advocacy and monitoring roles locally.
- Provide technical, logistic and material support to develop EFA regional coalitions and convene meetings between governments and national/regional NGOs; and
- Encourage inter-country collaboration to find common approaches and support specific inter-country initiatives to achieve EFA.

4. The post-2015 education agenda

In three years, we shall be reaching the 2015 target date set by the international community for both the EFA and MDG goals. Different development stakeholders have initiated processes to review progress and experiences and to define the post-2015 development agenda.

4.1 Participation in processes related to the definition of the post-2015 education or development agenda

The respondents provided a wide range responses on this topic. Some INGOs are aware of the process, but are currently not involved at any level. Others are not only well informed about all the various processes, but also have central roles and seats in several fora and groups that work with the post-2015 agenda both at the international, regional and national level. These organizations also have the post-EFA agenda high on their internal agendas and work on developing policies and advocacy positions.

4.2 Priorities for the period post-2015

Respondents brought up a broad range of issues relating to priorities for the post-2015 period. Some organizations single out one or two key themes they would like to see high on the post-2015 agenda while others cover all levels of education and various cross-cutting issues.

Some organizations argue that the post-2015 education agenda should be more explicitly **rights based**. Also, the benefits of a **holistic approach** were mentioned. From this point of view, a post-2015 agenda should cover all levels of education and might include several cross-cutting issues as well. Education International (EI) lists 10 areas it believes to be important for the next education agenda. International Council of Adult Education (ICAE) suggests lifelong learning and the goal of eco-human well-being as a starting point when designing a new set of education goals.

Quality and relevance are highlighted as key issues to be tackled post-2015 and to be included in the next generation education goals. World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES) suggests that quality education for all could form the backbone of a new and flexible framework with room for regional variations. International Association of Universities (IAU) point to the need for evaluations related to quality and relevance while both EI and Plan stress that teachers are pivotal for securing quality in education. Plan also underscore the importance

of safe and secure learning environments and education financing as important factors influencing the quality of learning. Also, quality and relevance are two concepts that must go hand in hand. Teachers are seen as key to quality. While Save the Children International (SCI) has not yet decided on which issues will be *top* priorities for its post-2015 engagement, learning and quality will remain one of two or three top priorities.

Several respondents pointed out that, as long as there are still millions of children out of school, there is a need for continued focus on **access**. Although much progress had been made since 2000 in reaching the universal primary education goal, that job is not done. Particularly, **marginalized** groups must be targeted.

Equity also features as a key issue to be included on the post-2015 education agenda. Plan highlights equity as one of three priority areas. ICAE sees the state as the main actor for “equitable and just societies.” Equity is also high on SCI’s post 2015-agenda. Equity is relevant both with respect to access and quality – particularly for the marginalized.

Transition to tertiary is flagged as an important post-2015 item for both IAU and World Assembly of Youth (WAY). A healthy education system is not only based on tertiary education systems providing qualified teachers, tertiary systems also provide research which forms the knowledge base sound policies as well as for teaching in many fields.

Single issues that were highlighted by only one respondent included: support for the diversification of language learning, attention to diversity and specifically sexual diversity, and awareness raising about dyslexia.

A few respondents shared their views on what kind of broader framework is needed post-2015. Some address the importance of ensuring a post-2015 framework that includes both the north and the south. WCCES argues for a framework that allows for national and regional variations pointing to the fact that a new framework needs to be relevant across countries and cultures. They further argue for an education agenda to be dovetailed on a sustainability agenda.