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Interactive thematic session

EDUCATION FOR ALL

Summary prepared by the Conference secretariat

1. The thematic session on Education for All aimed to promote interactive debate on the main points of the issues paper and deliverables among the participants from LDCs, developed and developing countries, UN agencies and other relevant intergovernmental agencies and NGOs.
2. The meeting focused on the challenge of achieving Education for All in the LDCs and in particular three goals which are in line with the Dakar Framework for Action:
 - Ensuring free, compulsory and universal primary education for both girls and boys by 2015; and also ensuring that all children, particularly girls, children living in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
 - Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, as well as equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;

- Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with the focus on ensuring girls full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

3. Participants stressed that sustainable development is not possible without quality education for all. Although education is linked to poverty reduction, health and building productive capacities, LDCs are facing massive under-investment in education. In LDCs, the rate of illiteracy hovers around 50 per cent, as compared with around 20 per cent in other countries. Out of a global total of 113 million children not partaking in formal education worldwide, 41 per cent are in LDCs. Also, in some LDCs, civil strife can result in loss of education for a whole generation.

4. The inherent difficulties for LDCs as a group in achieving education goals are enormous, but differ from country to country. For example, to achieve universal primary education by 2015, half of the 49 LDCs would need to double the primary school attendance rate. In a quarter of LDCs, enrolments would have to be multiplied fourfold. The need to multiply national efforts and international support measures to achieve these targets is evident.

5. Throughout the session, the importance of non-formal and girls' education was stressed as an investment with the highest potential return for sustainable development. It was also emphasized that through girls' education, other benefits, such as improved agriculture, increased child survival and better family income due to smaller and healthier families could be expected. In addition, given the alarming increase in the number of women infected with HIV/AIDS (six times higher than for boys), educating girls in the fight against HIV/AIDS is of paramount importance.

6. Against this background is the need for immediate action, with strong political commitment both nationally and internationally. It is vital that existing commitments such as the Dakar Framework for Action, currently not adhered to, should be honoured. Educational commitments must also have their place at the heart of the new Global Plan of Action for LDCs.

Principles

7. The meeting identified the following important principles:

- Education must be considered in a new light and not simply as the three Rs – rather, to create the right attitudes and aptitudes, to learn to interact and live together. Education needs to be conceived as a lifelong process which can help develop democratic values, produce active and reflective citizens, guarantee lasting peace and give people the opportunity to be free;
- Education policy should constitute an essential element in poverty reduction strategies. Strong synergies could be created between the achievement of eradicating poverty and

promoting education. As educating children involves sacrifice on the part of parents. It would be difficult to motivate parents to send their children to school if high drop-out rates and unemployment persist;

- Policies should be based on national ownership and be more demand-led. National commitment to education goals is essential. Moreover, Governments building on what already exists should provide encompassing resources. National action plans formulated in the context of the Dakar Framework should be produced by the year 2002 in partnership with civil society, parents and teaching communities;
- Governments, having formulated effective education policies and plans toward attaining the objectives of the commitments of the Dakar Framework, should be provided with the necessary resources from the international community. It is also important that essential aid flows be sustained to achieve educational targets.

Changed context

8. National education sector planning should be geared toward new realities affecting LDCs. The most important are: widening poverty, globalization, technological change and HIV/AIDS.

9. Education is not only a human right but also a tool of combating marginalization in the global economy. It is a precondition to reduce unemployment, poverty and achieve social progress and democracy. Illiteracy keeps LDCs marginalized and unable to perform in the global economy. Thus education is the key to participating in and benefiting from globalization.

10. One of the challenges of education in the context of globalization is the preservation of cultural diversity. As education lies at the heart of cultural identities, it should also reflect of its indigenous culture and tradition with science and technology.

11. Globalization produces challenges as well as opportunities for LDCs. Nevertheless, some economic and technical aspects of globalization are negative for LDCs. For example, globalization requires flexible labour. It also leads to asymmetric access to information and communication technologies (ICT) and as a result, to international networks. On the other hand, ICT technologies open up new opportunities for more efficient education systems. LDCs, however, lack resources to cope with transformations required by globalization including the reform of their educational systems;

12. The development of information and communication technologies is also seen as changing the parameters and processes of education. It was possible to think of "Information for All" through the creation of greater learning opportunities, even possible in basic education. The internet is an important tool and there are positive examples of private sector firms developing networking solutions for LDCs to access and transfer information.

13. The issue of HIV/AIDS must also be addressed, as it affects the supply-side of education, although education is a crucial tool for fighting HIV/AIDS. Increased awareness and appropriate preventive education are essential in the fight against this pandemic.

Strategies

14. Four important strategic ideas were emphasized in the Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All. First, a coherent approach to education was recommended through the integration of formal and informal education. Greater emphasis could be put on technical education and the teaching of science and technology; second, the importance of girls education; third, the importance of capacity-building, advocacy and South–South cooperation; and fourth, ways of mobilizing finance, necessary to achieve EFA.

15. There is a strong consensus that girls' education was crucial and could accelerate progress toward EFA goals. Special trust funds for girls education should be established. The role of female teachers was highlighted. There is a need to exchange successful experience in this regard. It is necessary to mainstream girls education and to formulate gender-sensitive policies.

16. Concern was expressed in regard to the tendency to neglect the critical contribution and cooperation of teachers in bringing about educational reform, especially for improving the quality of basic education. The need to enlarge partnerships with teachers and to pay greater attention to their training and working conditions was emphasized.

17. The role of non-formal education needs to be better appreciated and interfaced with the formal system.

18. Technical education also needs to be linked to enterprise development, the work environment and the requirements of the economy.

19. There is a problem of political will and also a lack of capacity and know-how to translate intention into action. Capacity-building, at all levels, is thus essential, particularly at the grass-roots level. There is also a need for advocacy.

20. Subsequent to the Dakar Framework for Action and within the context of preparations for LDC III, the ILO and UNCTAD established an advisory group to examine the desirability and feasibility of introducing Brazil's Bolca-Escola schemes into African LDCs. These schemes could develop minimum income support for women with small children on condition that their children attend school. In addition to being an effective way of reducing poverty and enabling the children of poor and vulnerable households to attend schools, they also assist poor families to develop a more effective work-oriented life-style.

21. There is a gap between the financial requirements for meeting international education goals in LDCs and total current aid flows to LDCs. This raises the need for advocacy to create greater

political commitment for education in LDCs at the international level. At the same time, it is necessary to explore innovative solutions, such as using debt relief for education and finding partnerships with the private sector. There is an urgent need to strengthen external partnerships to deliver EFA of a good quality.

Commitments

22. Several participants referred to the Dakar Framework for Action as the central reference for their actions. Accelerated efforts are now needed to fulfil the Dakar Framework's goals through global solidarity and decisive action. The deliverables presented within this framework are considered as crucial mechanisms for achieving Education for All. The major deliverables are:

- Supporting policy dialogue and programme development in education;
- LDCs' national EFA action plans;
- Strengthening LDCs' national institutional capacities.

23. The supplementary deliverables are:

- Promoting scientific and technological knowledge for sustainable development;
- Girls' education;
- Focusing resources on effective school health (FRESH);
- Education in emergency situations;
- HIV/AIDS and education.

24. There is a need to accelerate the preparation, and/or the review of national action plans by the year 2002. For countries already implementing their action plans, there is an urgent need to identify their requirements (human, financial, material, technical) in order to ensure that the shortfall of resources is covered for the effective implementation of their goals.
