

2001

E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting
Beijing, China

REPORT

Bangladesh

Brazil

China

Egypt

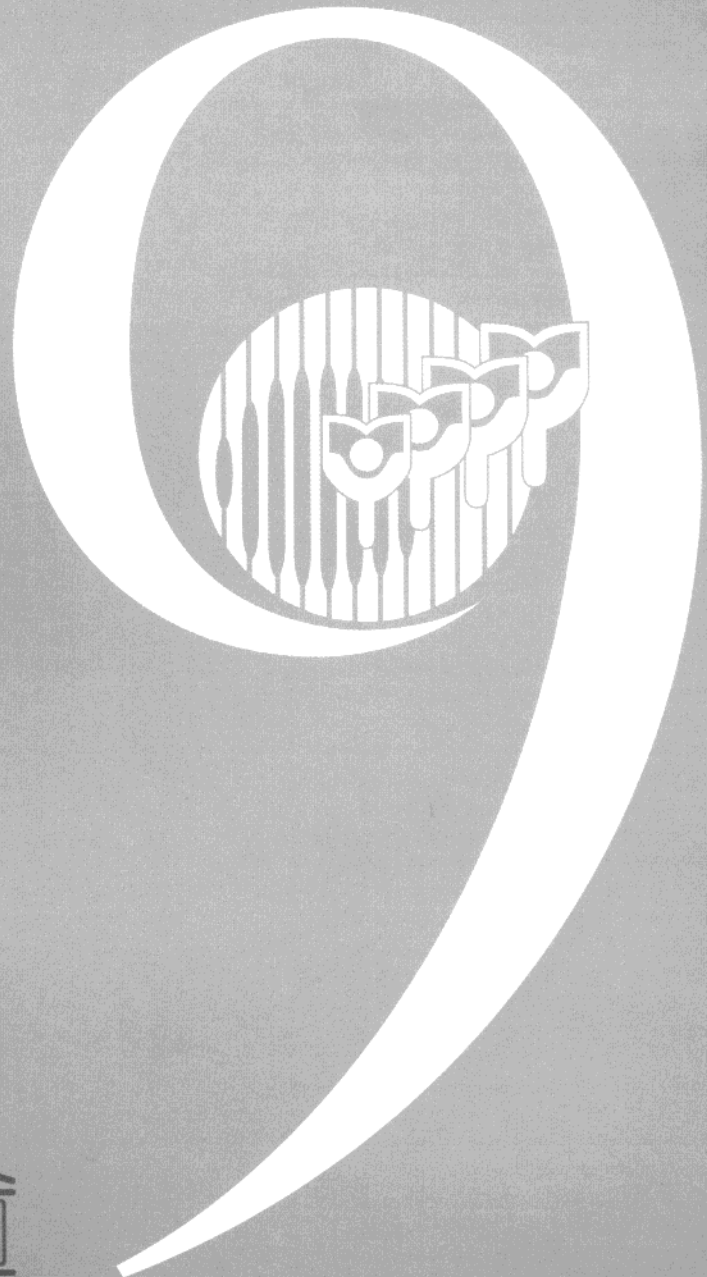
India

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For further information, please contact
Wolfgang Vollmann
Co-ordinator, E-9 Initiative
UNESCO
7, Place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP, France
Phone: +33 (0) 1 45 68 21 29
Fax: +33 (0) 1 45 68 56 29
E-mail: w.vollmann@unesco.org
Web site: www.unesco.org/education/e9

Editorial co-ordination
Editorial assistant

Wolfgang VOLLMANN
Karine BRUN

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PREFACE

The Ministers of Education from the nine high-population countries met on 22-23 August 2001, in Beijing, China, by kind invitation of the Chinese Government. Their meeting was preceded by an expert meeting on 21 August, to discuss the role and use of distance education and information technologies in basic education. The conclusions of the expert meeting were discussed by the Ministers and found their way into the final document.

This was the fourth time that Ministers from the E-9 countries met to review progress in EFA and to confirm their commitment to achieve education for all in the foreseeable future. Shortly after the World Conference on EFA, held in Jomtien, Thailand, back in 1990, the E-9 appeared on the educational scene as the most visible and effective lobby of countries, committed to EFA, and promoting the issue of basic education on the occasion of national or international fora. These countries were able to prove that progress was possible, despite very complex national constraints. In the field of basic education, development excludes the notion of "a quick fix", and patience and perseverance over the years are required until progress can be identified. In this respect the E-9 countries have fully succeeded, withstanding the pressures of educational emergencies, and harnessing the required longstanding political support and awareness for the benefit of educational progress.

This short document bears witness to an ongoing debate in the E-9 countries, where, in the context of progress achieved, there is a huge unfinished agenda, especially with regards to women and girls access to basic education, the need to improve the quality of primary education, close the gender gap, provide quality training to teachers and to considerably extend programmes for early childhood care and education. When in Beijing, Ministers also felt strongly that education for all policies, especially literacy, represented the most effective strategy to combat and reduce poverty in a long-term perspective. In fact the "Beijing Declaration", identifies poverty as a prime concern and challenge. Another commitment expressed by the Ministers, was their strong interest to use ICTs more frequently in expanding access to and improving the quality of basic education.

This publication attempts to present as best as possible the principal speeches and documents made available in Beijing. For reasons of space, the speeches had to be shortened but however still keeping an eye on the principal message to be delivered. The only document presented in extenso, is the "BEIJING DECLARATION", because this document is likely to guide the action of E-9 countries in the future. □

Principal conclusions of the experts meeting on distance education and new information and communication technologies for basic education, reaching the unreached

The Experts Meeting on Distance Education and NICTs for Basic Education held on 21-22 August 2001, opened with Sir John Daniel's six challenging key propositions:

- Distance education has created the opportunity for a revolution in education and training by reducing the costs of NICTs and at the same time enabling wider access and better quality but this does not always happen if political will is missing, if standards are not maintained for quality assurance and if intelligent partnerships are not created;
- Distance Education and ICTs in education have recently established their credibility in an undeniable fashion but this has not been integrated in national level decision-making processes;
- NICTs are an evolution and not a revolution from former distance education media. We must be hard-nosed about choosing media and methods that were tested and are appropriate to the particular challenge we are trying to meet;
- The main cause for the revolution vis-à-vis old technology and NICTs is the opportunity for the division of labour to organize education in new ways through a team of professionals for different processes and stages;
- Distance education has enormous potential in the education process particularly the training of teachers both pre and in-service training. There is a projected need of millions of teachers to achieve EFA, especially for adult basic education and preventive education (HIV/AIDS);
- Governments need to value this (NICTS & DE) mode more seriously and consistently than in the past. The revolution of distance education means that big is now beautiful in education.

The experts shared a range of successful models and well established practices of Distance Education and NICTs from their respective E-9 contexts. There were many common areas in spite of different country contexts and cultures.

The summary is presented in two parts structured as Consensus and Suggestions.

Consensus

We urge the international society in the spirit of the Dakar Framework of Action (April 2000) and the Genoa Communiqué (July 22, 2001) to lend greater support to ICT for promoting the EFA goals.

The widely accepted consensus is as follows:

The major objective is to have ICT reach the unreached with an implicit objective to substantively address poverty and equity, narrow the balance within countries and narrow the digital divide of E-9 with the rest of the countries.

In the country reports, it was seen with great satisfaction the variety of ICT activities that have been widely carried out even though resources are very limited. Among those efforts shared we have already come up with successful examples and experiences. Some of these models are more suitable for our contexts and may be shared by E-9 countries.

- We see the critical importance of government's commitment and political will for utilization of ICT for promoting EFA and particularly quality EFA, taking into account the compelling realities of globalisation and the digital divide.
- We agree to give more attention to our local non-governmental organizations, civil society with grassroots level initiatives to become active players in the promotion of Distance Education and ICT; the participation from those sectors is of critical importance.
- We fully endorse that financial resources are important and investment is the key to promotion of NICTs for EFA. Due to constraints of resources, to a varying extent, we need to bring attention to and rearrange the resources to put infrastructure hardware and software into ICT. Major adaptation of ICTs needs to be undertaken that is more suited to the unreached, in rural and far flung areas, disadvantaged groups, taking into account the gender divide in order to address basic education skills and EFA goals.
- We reiterate that balanced development of ICTs needs to be undertaken with attention to scale, quality and cost effectiveness. There is a need for further attention, while we are actively pursuing EFA goals, to recognize and respect differences of E9 countries and their country contexts. We need to protect our own indigenous culture and need to use ICTs aligned to our own cultural specifications, emphasizing value-based education.
- The choice and mix of technology (method and content) must be matched to local infrastructure. Local ICTs must integrate utilization of ICTs with optimum choice, which is feasible, practical and doable. While we are using ICTs for the promotion of EFA we need to give a lot of effort to solving the infrastructure problems pertaining to hardware and software. Attention must also be given to education reform and its accompanying hardware and software; including assessment systems for measuring impact where standardized evaluations must take into account local contexts.
- Training of teachers is extremely important to reaching the EFA goal; distance education and ICTs have powerful potential to addressing access and quality for EFA in terms of skills new teachers and re-training of existing pedagogues.

Suggestions

We reiterate the importance of government's commitment and political will for EFA goals with ICTs. There is a need to increase investment in that area and to form a suitable policy to support the commitment.

The opportunity is there.

The time is right.

The technology is available.

The attention is urgent ... we must seize the opportunity to reach the goal of EFA and narrow the digital divide!

We encourage the non-governmental organizations and private sector to participate actively through an enabling environment so that they may fully perform their role as partners.

Through one and a half days of discussion and sharing of our common interest, we found that a mechanism is needed in order for us to be able to share ICT initiatives to meet EFA goals. This mechanism needs to be suitable for our E-9 countries which will greatly benefit all of us such as:

- a web based e-net with options for different languages;
- a resource centre for sharing hardware and software, and information on capacity building opportunities within E-9 countries supervised by E-9 experts as well as other relevant institutions. □

Opening speech by Mr Zhang Xinsheng, Vice-Minister of Education, China

I have tremendous pleasure in extending, on behalf of the Ministry of Education of the People's of Republic of China and the Chinese National Commission for UNESCO, our warmest welcome to all the distinguished guests and in expressing our congratulations on the convening of this meeting. The whole of Beijing and all its people are welcoming you. I am sure that the moment you arrive in Beijing you must be able to feel the enormous joy of the city. With the pleasure of winning the bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games still with us, we have now the added joy of hosting the E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting and the 21st Universiad.

Beijing, a famous city with a long history and splendid culture, is the political, cultural and economic centre of People's Republic of China today. Beijing, oriented towards the world, modernization and the future, is changing day by day. It gains vitality and dynamism from more and more international exchanges. It is, thus, with great pleasure that we are able to discuss with you here in Beijing a topic of tremendous significance, namely, how to facilitate development of EFA through distance education and NICTs.

The rapid development of information and communication technologies is profoundly changing the way of production, living and learning. Accordingly the knowledge of IT and the competence of its application are becoming a prerequisite for survival and development in the future society. Although meeting basic learning needs remains the essential content of EFA, our challenge is how to reach the goal of EFA with the assistance of distance education, and new information and communication technologies.

EFA in the new century requires new driving forces such as distance education and new information and communication technologies, which will dramatically expand the boundaries of time and space of education, change the way we learn and bring about rapid flow of high quality educational and teaching resources. Information technology offers new opportunities for us to universalize education and enhance both the quality and efficiency of education. I am convinced that it will provide powerful technical support to EFA in E-9 countries by opening up a completely new channel. It is also bound to bring about leapfrogging development of EFA.

Bearing in mind the rapid development ICT across the world, the experts meeting will primarily deliberate on the application of distance education and NICTs in EFA. The meeting will provide fresh boost to the development of EFA in each of our countries, especially to education for the poverty-stricken areas and the disadvantaged groups. This is an issue which the Chinese government has attached great importance to and has enjoyed extensive support from all social sectors. We cherish the opportunities offered by this meeting for face-to-face exchanges with each and every one of the participants.

The nine high-population countries are all developing countries. Since the New Delhi Conference, in order to attain the objective of education for all, we have joined hands, sharing both gains and pains. The great thinker in ancient China, Confucius, said "where there are three people walking

together, one of them is bound to be able to teach me something." We could learn from each other by sharing the achievements and experiences that each us have made. And we are also keenly aware that we have quite a number of issues of common concern in our efforts to develop and reform education. I sincerely hope that the experts present here will make common efforts so as to render this meeting a complete success. I also hope that during your stay here, you will have some time for appreciating the changing city of Beijing, sharing our joy and understanding our difficulties in our development endeavours.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you a pleasant stay and good health in Beijing.

□

Extracts of the speeches by Mr Koichiro Matsuura, Director General of UNESCO

This is the fourth E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting. I must tell you that I deeply regretted being unable to attend the third E-9 meeting held in Recife, Brazil, soon after I became the Director-General of UNESCO. I read the report of the Brazil meeting with great interest and I know how useful that meeting was for the preparations leading towards the World Education Forum in Dakar. I am, therefore, especially happy to attend this E-9 meeting, to which I assign high importance.

This meeting in Beijing represents a valuable opportunity for the nine high-population countries, but also for UNESCO and the other agencies, to evaluate past achievements and map out clearly the remaining tasks to be performed in the period ahead. Education for All is a vital concern for all of us here today. We must address it with unrelenting determination and energy if we want to improve the quality of life of the peoples in the E-9 countries and to ensure a better world for future generations.

It is the strong belief of this Organization that priority action for EFA implies focusing our attention on the E-9 countries and by facilitating their task whenever possible, both at national and international levels.

The outcomes of this E-9 meeting will guide UNESCO in its future activities, both in the context of Dakar follow-up and in setting appropriate priorities for intensified support to EFA, especially in the context of the forthcoming **31st UNESCO General Conference**, which is to start in six weeks' time, and during the first meeting of the **High-Level Group** on EFA that will be held on 29-30 October 2001 in Paris.

We all recognize that substantial and accelerated EFA progress in the E-9 countries, which represent half of the world's population and over two-thirds of its adult illiterates, would have a massive impact on the global EFA challenge. This heterogeneous group of countries has maintained visibility because of their impressive progress in EFA, their ability to reduce demographic growth rates and their capacity to act as a lobby in favour of EFA whenever necessary. I cannot imagine today's global drive for EFA without the dynamic energy and support of the E-9 Initiative, which has also provided evidence of how important are political will and commitment for securing EFA progress. All those who contributed in any way to the creation of the E-9 Initiative must feel a justifiable sense of pride in what has been achieved.

Before examining some of the major achievements that have been reached, it is necessary to contextualize them by referring to the **political, social and economic rationale** underlying the EFA policies of the E-9 countries. When meeting in Delhi in 1993, the leaders agreed on considering **the growth of basic education as an essential building-block of national development**. In this perspective, the pursuit of sustainable development and the struggle against poverty are not seen as detached from the fight for EFA: after all, how can the poor join the struggle against poverty if they are not equipped by education to identify opportunities and

take advantage of them? Education, therefore, is an indispensable segment of the bridge across which the poor can travel from misery to hope. It is crucial to the empowerment of people.

Numerous studies have shown that basic education in particular contributes to economic growth in developing countries. Investment in basic education produces high rates of return. Ministers of Finance should be pleased to learn that basic education produces substantial value for money, as is reflected both in national accounts and in individual earnings. As people are educated, earnings grow, so do savings, so does investment and, in turn, so does the material well-being of society overall. Basic education contributes decisively to improving a community's quality of life through improved health, better food consumption and sanitary practices, better fertility control, improved child health and nutrition, and greater openness toward innovation and the acceptance of new ideas. Clearly, as the E-9 countries have recognized, basic education is the key to national development. A nation simply cannot hope to sustain economic growth and alleviate poverty without a literate and numerate population.

If basic education is now widely recognized as a highly productive investment, much more can be said about the social and economic returns from **female literacy** in terms of women's self-confidence, dignity and productivity. Female literacy also has multiplier effects. As mothers, literate women are key educators of their own children and counselors for other women. We also know that literate mothers have fewer and healthier children. That leads in turn to lower population growth. Being educated, moreover, they want their own children to be educated. Thus, there is a virtuous circle associated with female literacy.

Let me now turn to some of the remarkable achievements recorded by the E-9 countries during the past decade. The recent EFA 2000 Assessment, which served as the basis for the World Education Forum in Dakar, revealed encouraging results which authorize me to say that the E-9 countries have not only kept their word but in some cases have actually exceeded the agreed objectives. A quantum jump in EFA occurred in the E-9 countries between 1990 and 1999: **net enrolments in primary education** increased by more than 20 per cent in Bangladesh, by 16 per cent in China, by 12 per cent in Egypt, and by 16 per cent in Pakistan. During the last decade of the twentieth century, literacy levels rose dramatically in Bangladesh (by more than 25 per cent), in India (by 15 per cent), and in Pakistan (by 16 per cent), to cite just a few examples.

Another very significant achievement concerns the **reduced rates of demographic growth**: China achieved a 0.9 per cent annual growth rate, a remarkable accomplishment, and annual population growth rates fell during the course of the 1990s from 2.6 to 1.7 per cent in Bangladesh, from 2.05 to 1.6 per cent in India and from 3.1 to 2.6 per cent in Pakistan.

The E-9 countries, taken as a whole, have made visible progress in raising both the **literacy rate** and the absolute number of literates, and also in reducing the number of illiterates. The 1990s saw the number of adult literates increase from 1.2 billion to 1.6 billion (a 34 per cent increase in relative terms), while the number of illiterates slightly declined from 640 million to 625 million (a drop of 2 per cent).

The past ten years have also taught us some useful lessons. We now understand that governments are not the only providers of basic education. NGOs and **civil society** institutions close to grassroots realities have helped society reach out to the most disadvantaged groups and address their learning needs in new and creative ways. In addition, **private basic education** has developed considerably in recent years, and it is time to acknowledge its valuable social and educational contributions, though we maintain that private education, which has become a powerful educational provider in some countries and especially in big cities, must adhere to mainstream national education policies and meet established quality standards.

The E-9 countries' achievements are important in their own right but they also serve as a positive and encouraging example to others. At the same time, however, we must acknowledge that serious problems are still unresolved and enormous challenges remain. Thus, UNESCO remains deeply concerned by the fact that approximately **56 million school-age children** do not attend primary school in the E-9 countries. We also note that dropout and repetition remain serious problems, though we acknowledge that several promising initiatives aimed at improving the internal efficiency of primary schooling are in progress in the E-9 countries. Retaining children in primary school and maintaining the momentum and continuity of their educational development are vital for securing sustainable levels of literacy.

With regard to **literacy and adult education**, we must acknowledge that serious problems remain concerning the eradication of adult illiteracy in the E-9 countries. In 2000, it was estimated that 71 per cent of the world's illiterates, or 625 million adult illiterates, are in the E-9 countries. This share has remained almost constant since 1990 despite the decline recorded in terms of absolute numbers of illiterates and rates of illiteracy. Currently, two of the E-9 countries, India and China, account for half of the world's illiterate population. It is noteworthy that the E-9 countries, which account for more than half of the world's population and over two-thirds of its adult illiterates, contribute only 48 per cent of the world's literate population.

In light of the assumption that progress towards full literacy becomes self-sustainable once the critical threshold of 70 per cent is reached, the problem of illiteracy seems to be particularly serious in countries such as Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Nigeria and Pakistan. These countries have literacy rates stubbornly below 70 per cent despite their many efforts to achieve a decisive breakthrough.

Another concern of UNESCO is the fact that, like other developing countries, **the majority of adult illiterates are female**. In 2000, women accounted for 64 per cent of total adult illiterates in the E-9 countries and this proportion has not changed since 1990. Female illiteracy is estimated to be 36 per cent in the E-9 countries, compared with 19 per cent for men. The size of the current gender gap and the pace at which it has been narrowing over the past decade deserve particular attention: concrete action to extend education to all girls and women is urgently needed!

UNESCO is also concerned about the **urban/rural divide** within countries. The literacy profiles of the E-9 countries are characterized by a strong urban/rural bias that often reflects and reproduces socio-economic disparities between regions. Available literacy data for India, Bangladesh and Nigeria clearly indicate that literacy rates in rural areas are much lower than those in urban areas;

moreover, data also indicate significant variations between regions and provinces, which aggravate an already existing educational and social crisis within these countries.

These hard facts on illiteracy in some of the E-9 countries also convince us that their educational problems are closely inter-connected. Thus, primary education will not progress significantly in terms of both access and quality as long as literacy is not advancing on the fast track too. In the context of the E-9 Initiative, the most promising strategic elements for improving the quality of EFA programmes, including formal primary education, are literacy, gender equity and enhancing the role of civil society. These elements furnish the foundations of a broad-based, nation-wide EFA strategy based on consensus and the mobilization of all segments of society.

When I began this speech, I referred to such achievements of the E-9 countries as their conspicuous EFA progress and the important decline of population growth rates. Obviously, much remains to be done to achieve real EFA, though some countries have more grounds for concern than others. I would like next to turn to a number of prospective developments and opportunities that encourage us to be optimistic. For example, almost all of the E-9 countries have completed the redrafting or modification of their respective **national EFA action plans**. During this meeting, we expect many of the honourable speakers to present the broad outlines of their EFA plans, which will provide a road-map towards the achievement of all six EFA goals during the years ahead.

We should recognize that, during the past ten years, new modalities for delivering educational services and new teaching/learning methods and tools have appeared on the scene. I refer, of course, to the role of **new information and communication technologies** and to advances made in the field of **distance education**. UNESCO has recently published a study entitled *Distance Education in the E-9 Countries*, whose conclusions already have been widely discussed within the expert meeting held yesterday and this morning. The considerable potential of distance education has been identified, especially in the area of pre-service and in-service teacher training. However, it appears that distance education modalities are not being taken up by adult and non-formal education in a significant manner, at least not yet. On the other hand, there is some evidence to suggest that strategies exist to expand the use of ICTs to reach greater numbers of girls and women, especially in rural areas. Clearly, the situation on the ground is rather uneven.

It is also heartening to learn that there is a growing range of projects using **ICTs in formal classroom teaching**, which may substantially improve the quality and range of formal primary education. We applaud such commendable initiatives, of course, but caution that they must be evaluated carefully before we pin too many hopes upon them. It may well be the case, at least for the immediate future in many developing countries that the main impact of ICTs and distance education will not be made directly on children in classrooms. Instead, their impact will be made indirectly, through their influence upon **teacher training** and the spread of more effective teaching and learning practices. Teachers remain the chief medium through which the quality of education is improved.

There are lessons to be learned and shared in such matters. And here I want to place emphasis on an important aspect of the E-9 Initiative, namely, the opportunity it provides for your countries –

different in so many respects but facing some common problems – to interact and to exchange ideas, information and experiences regarding the struggle to achieve EFA. The E-9 Initiative offers a chance to engage in genuine **South-South cooperation**. We note with pleasure that the E-9 countries share knowledge and good practices not only among themselves but also with their neighbours in their respective regions and subregions. We encourage you to continue in this direction. Education for All is primarily a national responsibility but more and more we recognize that, within and without, it is best advanced through co-operation and teamwork.

As the Ministers of Education of the E-9 countries, you have gathered here to review the actions taken since Dakar and, more importantly, to identify those concrete, practical measures that must be adopted if the most urgent and important objectives before us are to be addressed effectively. This meeting is an occasion for the E-9 countries to take stock of their available options so that, in the perspective of key objectives and requirements to be fulfilled, realistic choices about priority future actions regarding EFA can be made.

I have already indicated several objectives, needs and emphases that must be addressed if further EFA progress is to be achieved and sustained: **first**, the economics of basic education, including the mobilization of resources and the returns to investment in EFA; **second**, achieving literacy for all as an integral part of anti-poverty strategies; **third**, the importance of improving the quality of basic education so that its full benefits may be reaped; and, **fourth**, the urgent and imperative need to provide quality basic education and skills to all girls and women. An essential condition for achieving these objectives is effective social and political mobilization for EFA at all levels of society. In addition, it is vital to harness the available human resources (especially teachers) and new technological developments for the benefit of basic education in order to serve the under-served, the reach the unreached, and to improve the quality of learning and teaching. The E-9 countries can set the pace and act as models to other countries provided they remain focused on agreed objectives and sustain the momentum of political will generated in Delhi and reconfirmed in Dakar.

I thank you for your attention.

□

Address by Mrs Sonia Mendieta de Badaroux, Chairperson of the Executive Board of UNESCO

Both as President of the Executive Board of UNESCO and as the national of a developing country, I take a keen interest in all matters related to education, especially basic education, which I consider to be of the utmost importance for the future of mankind. UNESCO has a clear mandate in the field of education and, following the World Education Forum that was held in Dakar last year, both the Executive Board and the Director-General are determined to carry out this mandate unreservedly by making basic education for all a priority for the years ahead. The Executive Board of UNESCO has also accorded a special status to the E-9 initiative, not only because of the size of the respective countries, but also in view of the magnitude and the difficulty to achieve the EFA goals in such populous countries.

Since 1990, when the international community met for the first time to put EFA on the international agenda and adopted goal-oriented objectives and a framework for action, significant progress has been achieved in many countries of the globe, while in some countries it will be several years before these objectives will become a reality. It was most encouraging to have a group of E-9 countries joining forces in 1993 and establishing themselves as the group of high-population countries to achieve EFA in the shortest possible time. It is no wonder, therefore, that these E-9 countries assembled here today have over the years become a powerful and visible pressure group in favour of EFA. First and foremost, because they have managed to achieve significant EFA progress, which has been confirmed by the EFA 2000 assessment in most of the E-9 countries. These achievements have obviously enhanced the credibility and visibility of the E-9 Initiative, as became apparent at the Dakar Forum, which demonstrated a high level of mobilization and commitment to EFA, with several countries firmly committing themselves to continue to provide leadership to the EFA movement and to encourage their respective governments to sustain an ambitious EFA agenda.

As a result of this determination to maintain the priorities on the E-9 agenda, to achieve progress and sharing your experiences with other countries, this Initiative has met with wide acclaim, as it is considered a success by many other countries. More recently the E-9 have been showing international solidarity and co-operation by increasingly reaching out to those countries that face similar challenges. Although the E-9 objectives were regarded by many countries as unattainable, the E-9 assessment of EFA data over the past years have belied this concern, and have testified that results are possible, provided that political will is matched with wide social support and commitment.

It is common knowledge that the E-9 comprises two-thirds of the world's adult illiterates, which is tantamount to 600 million people. This is a staggering figure by any standard! Many of these illiterates are women, who are deprived of their fundamental right to education and are – consequently – largely excluded from participation in economic, social and cultural life, and – implicitly – from making their contribution to national development. Although for several years now the E-9 countries have made the gender issue a priority and some progress has been made, the

number of illiterate women, especially in rural areas, is still impressive. Numerous studies have shown how the exclusion of women hampers rural development and economic growth; and that literacy, especially skills training, and functional literacy for women, are indispensable for a harmonious and democratic society, and more specifically for national development. We should bear in mind that – according to the available data - it is especially the women in E-9 countries that are the most vulnerable and the hardest hit by poverty and illiteracy. This underlines why national policies to combat poverty in this group of countries are most effective when targeting illiterate women, whose education, if linked to income-generating activities, is a pre-requisite for sustainable living

In this connection, it should be noted that UNESCO has been asked by the United Nations General Assembly to conceive and lead a United Nations decade for literacy, which in the context of the E-9, constitutes a great responsibility. In view of the large numbers of women illiterates in the E-9 countries and the widespread poverty among these women, I express the hope that E-9 decision-makers, at all levels in society, will develop programmes focusing in a comprehensive manner on literacy for women, skills training, and poverty alleviation. What is needed at this stage is a strong political commitment of the leaders of each country to address the issue of extreme poverty and women's illiteracy in a forward-looking manner, with due attention to the empowerment of women, by providing them with the essential tools, such as literacy, skills and knowledge, to escape poverty and its alienating cycle of deprivation and exclusion.

The deliberations on the potentials of modern technologies during this conference will most likely provide insight into how the means of modern communications can contribute towards conceiving efficient learning programmes for women, including those living in isolation or deprived of access to learning tools and new professional skills. Information technologies are certainly not a panacea, but a promising instrument to enhance the quality of learning at all levels, especially where women have been denied access to the learning society.

As chair of the Executive Board of UNESCO I hope that the E-9 countries will set out to develop more programmes focusing on functional literacy, and targeting poor, illiterate women; and on income-generating and post-literacy activities. Bringing literacy and skills to poor women would seem to BE the most promising strategy to effectively combat the scourge of poverty and exclusion. In the field of poverty alleviation programmes and literacy, too many programmes have been shown to produce a fragmented approach, while comprehensive strategies, based on the real needs of the people, and especially women, have produced impressive results. Such forward-looking programmes are likely to further reduce population growth and also contribute to better health and improved environmental practice. □

Closing remarks by John Daniel, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO

Introduction

Vice-Minister of Education of China; distinguished members of the E-9 and observer delegations; UNESCO colleagues; ladies and gentlemen.

I have to say that the experience has exceeded my expectations, which were high. Countries have reported on their progress towards the goals of Education for All with admirable thoroughness. I believe that we can be inspired by the progress that has been made. We have also seen each of the ministers lay out a clear agenda for the future. Furthermore, as the Chinese minister, Ms Chen Zhili, has just pointed out, this agenda reflects the new century rather than the old.

My brief closing remarks are in four parts. I shall thank our hosts, comment on the progress towards EFA, reflect on the expert meeting on distance education and NICTs, and then look towards the future.

Thank you China

You will all want to join me in warmly thanking our Chinese hosts, not just for the excellent organization of our meeting but also for the extraordinary 'extracurricular' events that they have arranged.

It was a great privilege for me to accompany the Director-General and the ministers to their meeting with President Jiang Zemin yesterday afternoon. That meeting quickly became an affable and informal exchange of views. The President dwelt on the link between education and culture – which is very important to UNESCO – and chatted about the challenge of regional disparities and the opportunities of ethnic and linguistic diversity.

Education for All

Turning to the Ministerial Review of progress towards Education for All, what struck me most was the political will to succeed in EFA that is now evident in all countries. It is clear, as the representative of the World Bank just observed, that each of the E-9 countries now owns this enterprise. That is partly because of the unassailable evidence that has now been accumulated about the role of education in development. Education is both a human right and the key to economic development. We can also quantify some of the important thresholds, for example that literacy becomes self-sustaining once it reaches 70 per cent. The Chinese minister, Ms Chen Zhili, summed it up well when she said that her country was 'converting population pressure into huge human resources'.

In the reports we also saw evidence of determined and realistic planning. That includes getting to grips with some of the statistical challenges of measuring progress, because we all know that if you can't measure it you can't manage it.

Countries keyed their reports on EFA explicitly to the six goals of Dakar. In this they showed that they share the holistic approach to Education for All that was articulated at Dakar. The plans for the future that were outlined were both ambitious and realistic, paying close attention to resource needs.

The holistic perspective on EFA manifested itself in various ways. We noted that some countries are attending to the nutrition of children as an educational challenge, not just a health challenge. Awareness of the vital role of early childhood education, and plans for expanding it, were evident in all countries. We were given projections for reducing the gender gap in the education of children and heard about programmes to empower adult women in support of this goal. All these elements of the educational context contribute to the improvement of the quality of education, which has been a constant refrain in our discussions.

This holistic approach and the determination to improve quality are leading most of the countries to a considerable decentralization of their education systems and to an emphasis on bringing together the schools and the community at the local level. We were also impressed by the stress some E-9 countries are placing on values in education. There is an evident desire to do better than some developed countries in giving citizens the moral and ethical framework that will foster a co-operative and non-violent society. That means close involvement of the civil society. Once again, Ms Chen Zhili, the Chinese minister, expressed it well when she talked about 'education involving the social forces of the whole society'.

Distance education and new ICTs

Turning to the work of the experts meeting on distance education and NICTs I must first apologize if the document *Distance Education in the E-9 Countries*, that UNESCO prepared for this meeting, does not do full justice to the richness of developments in your countries. You will understand that this is a fast-moving field and the report was prepared some time ago. Furthermore, I consider that part of the role of such documents is to stimulate rebuttal and revision. For example, I am sure we were all glad that Egypt was provoked into giving us a splendid demonstration of its deployment of educational technology. It was a privilege for us to take part from Beijing in a videoconference involving teachers from all over Egypt.

In the country reports we were given considerable data about the availability of hardware and the penetration of the Internet in the education systems of the E-9 countries. The presentations suggested to me that we are further ahead than we thought in deploying NICTs, although there is still a long way to go before the term *digital divide* can be retired from our vocabulary.

The next step is for us to invest in a more determined way in the evaluation of the impact of distance education, and NICTs in education and to promote research and development on the applications of these technologies to our specific EFA needs. This is particularly important for the E-9 countries where the scale of the educational challenge means that we cannot afford to make major mistakes. However, this can also be expressed positively. The scale of the E-9 countries, and the systematic approach to educational development that was evident in the reports we heard,

gives us an opportunity to show the world how NICTs can make education more effective at scale and help us reach the unreached.

This implies conceiving our uses of distance education and NICTs within the whole environment of education in all its complexity rather than simply focusing on small projects. In this context I noted the concerns expressed by Brazil and Egypt about the lack of any international accreditation mechanisms for distance education and the opportunities this vacuum creates for unscrupulous operators. I am pleased to inform you that UNESCO will convene a group of experts to examine this issue in September. I hasten to add that UNESCO is not seeking an accreditation role for itself, which would be entirely inappropriate. However, UNESCO can provide a forum for the international community to review and address this important issue and develop an agenda for tackling it.

More generally, the experts meeting was extremely useful in defining the agenda for the use of distance education and NICTs. The diversity of uses of educational technology in the E-9 countries vindicated the observations, in my introductory statement, that we must look to a multiplicity of media and apply them appropriately to each particular challenge.

UNESCO will play its role, along with other international agencies such as UNICEF and the Commonwealth of Learning, in helping you to implement your agendas for distance education and NICTs. We shall also ensure that education has a prominent place in the work of the UN Task Force on ICTs that has been established by the Secretary General, Kofi Annan.

Mr Khan and I will be working together to support you and to ensure that UNESCO's work in this area does concentrate on reaching the unreached and, more generally on helping you develop realistic and evidence-based programmes for applying distance education and NICTs to the achievement of the EFA agenda.

Conclusions and Follow-up

In conclusion, our task now is to implement the *Beijing Declaration of the E-9 Countries* that we have just adopted unanimously. It contains many challenges but we can return home from this meeting fortified by the conviction that we are making progress.

For its part, and in relation to the Declaration, UNESCO will, *inter alia*, within its programme for the 2002/2003 biennium:

- Assist in the finalization of national plans of action for EFA and help you to secure the funding necessary to implement them.
- Continue, in practical ways, to help countries close up the gender gap and serve the disadvantaged.
- Pay particular attention to the development of early childhood education through suitable initiatives.
- Encourage and facilitate the involvement of civil society in these processes.
- Support you in striving to improve the quality of education at all levels.

- Provide assistance in developing strategies for closing the digital divide and using distance education and NICTs effectively.
- Create a technology-based mechanism to foster the exchange of experiences, resources and materials between the E-9 countries between our meetings.
- Place special emphasis on the development and implementation of approaches to teacher training, both pre-service and in-service that can be applied at scale.
- Develop the work of the EFA Observatory.
- Work closely with other international development partners in pursuit of these goals.

That is a big agenda for UNESCO and for each of the E-9 countries. However, this meeting in China has inspired us to believe that we can achieve the goals we have set.

In expressing, once again, our gratitude to our Chinese hosts for an excellent and timely meeting, I also thank Egypt for its generous offer to host the next E-9 Ministerial Review in 2003. □

Beijing Declaration of the E-9 Countries

Adopted by the E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting Beijing, China, 21-23 August 2001

Recognizing that education is a fundamental right and key to social and economic development, we, the Ministers and representatives of the nine high-population countries, have come together in Beijing to review the progress made in education for all (EFA) since the World Education Forum (Dakar, April 2000), to assess the challenges posed to EFA by the swift development of the global information society, to reexamine the strategies for developing EFA.

We solemnly reaffirm our commitment to the goals set by the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, March 1990) to the Delhi Declaration (December 1993) and the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) to meet the basic learning needs of all our peoples.

We will ensure in our national action plans that due attention is given to provide equal access to quality education for all.

Achievements

We acknowledge that as a result of our strong commitment to EFA during the past decade, encouraging progress has occurred in all E-9 countries as reported by the EFA 2000 Assessment and more recent data.

In this respect, the most important achievements are the following:

- EFA has become a strategic priority on agendas of national development;
- Early childhood care and education is increasingly being incorporated into the overall plan for national educational development;
- The quality of universal primary education has been raised and gender disparities have been narrowed;
- Adult literacy rates have increased as well as skills training, especially for women;
- Distance education and new ICTs and other educational innovations are being given due attention to improve access to learning and enhance the quality of education.

Challenges

However, we still face a number of challenges. These include:

- Alleviating poverty;
- Providing quality education for all including learner-centered curricula, appropriate professional development of teachers, and the establishment of conducive school environments;
- Eliminating gender and other disparities;
- Total eradication of illiteracy;

- Giving attention to holistic early childhood care and education so as to ensure that every child realizes his/her full potential;
- Further reducing the drop-out and repetition rates, absenteeism, low school enrolment and poor classroom performance;
- Narrowing the digital divide by harnessing the potential of ICTs to achieve the goals of EFA;
- Providing adequate learning opportunities for young people completing primary education, in secondary education and vocational and technical training; and
- Devising methodologies in education to ensure that the scourge of HIV/AIDS is halted.

Strategies

In view of our past achievements, cognizant of the goals of the Dakar Framework for Action, appreciating the tremendous contemporary developments and noting the challenges ahead of us, we hereby commit to the following strategies:

1. Finalize the formulation of national action plans for EFA and ensure their timely implementation;
2. Strive to increase governmental financial inputs for EFA;
3. Accelerate result-oriented policies and programmes to eliminate the gender gap and achieve gender equality by 2010 especially focusing on rural areas;
4. Reinforce action-oriented programmes to meeting the learning needs of disadvantaged groups such as children with special needs, migrants, minorities and the rural/urban poor;
5. Ensure involvement and support of all segments of civil society as well as full and effective participation of the community in the promotion of EFA;
6. Expand and improve early childhood care and education services, especially in rural areas;
7. Adopt measures to meet the learning needs of all in order to improve the quality and outcomes of education especially by developing learner-centered curricula, and appropriate teacher professional development;
8. Provide safe and caring school environments that allow students to become healthy, alert and secure in order to learn effectively and fully participate in all educational activities;
9. Recognize that ICTs are only a means and not an end in themselves, their application in all fields of basic education, especially to reach the unreached and provide for acquisition of additional skills, shall be accorded greater attention and encouragement;

10. Create a network on the use of ICTs to foster interactions and experiences and sharing of resources, both human and material, in view of the challenges and the constraints of resources facing E-9 countries;
11. Reinvigorate efforts at raising the quality of teacher professional development in formal and non-formal education. Special attention shall be paid to meeting full requirements of female teachers and of teachers in disadvantaged and rural areas;
12. Embark upon and sufficiently fund the comprehensive training of teachers, administrators and others in the use of ICTs;
13. Ensure the infusion of human, environmental and ethical values in all fields of basic education with a view to realizing the goals of EFA and the all-round development of the individual in society;
14. Strengthen the capabilities and increase capacities for the collection and processing of EFA data and improve monitoring systems;
15. Commission strategic collaborative projects that will inform practice and policy in key areas of basic education among the E-9 countries. Some of these projects will be:
 - Identification and documentation of best practice in ICTs and distance education, poverty alleviation and EFA, indicators for literacy and non-formal education as well as planning and management;
 - Investigation into the prospects and appropriate scenarios for reducing the digital divide caused by the fast development of ICTs.
16. Replicate, with appropriate modifications to suit national needs, the success stories achieved by NGOs in the E-9 countries.

The Role of the International Development Partners

We recognize that the E-9 countries will have to rely primarily on their own abilities as well as use the synergies generated by the E-9 Initiative to constantly enhance self-development. However, realizing the major concern and constraints in the promotion of EFA goals and appreciating the commitment of the international development partners, made in Dakar, towards external financial assistance, we urge international financial organizations as well as bilateral and multilateral agencies to make a concerted and practical effort to fill the resource gap through the instruments of debt relief, debt cancellation and debt swaps by a standing mechanism.

The support and collaboration from our international development partners are of utmost importance and provide tremendous impetus to our national and collective efforts.

In view of the concentration of illiterates in the E-9 countries and in line with their commitments made in Dakar, we invite all international development partners to further expand their co-operation with the E-9 countries.

Special concerns

We urge:

- developed countries to consider it their moral obligation and duty to play an active role in bridging the digital divide, so as to promote international co-operation, mutual understanding and peace;
- sponsorship by UNESCO together with other agencies of holistic early childhood development and education programmes. This initiative should invest in full the potential of the windows of opportunity for achieving the full capacity of our children and will constitute a solid base for optimal human resource development for achieving excellence. It should also take measures to ensure the participation of other concerned sectors of the society including the medical profession, social workers, media, the family and the civil society.

Future Commitments

We, the Ministers and representatives of the E-9 countries, reaffirm our joint commitment and pledge, to intensify our efforts and strengthen policies for achieving the laudable goal of education for all. Towards this end, we shall finalize our national action plans by the year 2002, including the identification of required resources, especially human, infrastructural and financial.

We acknowledge the opportunities ahead and the important contribution of distance education and the appropriate and effective use of ICTs to reinforcing all aspects of basic education as a strong foundation towards lifelong learning and the creation of a knowledge and learning society.

We recognize the importance of early childhood care and education to improve access to schooling and quality of EFA and open up windows of opportunity leading to excellence, and commit ourselves to develop and expand appropriate programmes.

We stress the role of education in poverty reduction as well as the promotion of social and economic growth, non-violence, tolerance, social justice and respect for cultural diversity.

We commit ourselves to increase educational provision for young people and adults and to create opportunities for lifelong learning.

In light of the commitment stated during the course of our deliberations in Beijing, we, the Ministers and representatives of the E-9 countries, solemnly confirm our resolve and great determination to achieve quality education for all. □

List of Participants

E-9 COUNTRIES

Bangladesh

Dr Delwar Hossain
Deputy Chief Planning, Primary and Mass Education
Division
Government of the People Republic of Bangladesh
Tel: (880) 2 8610 292
Fax: (880) 2 8618 871
E-mail: pmed.gob@bdcom.com

Mr Humayun A. Kamal
Ambassador of Bangladesh to China
Tel: (861) 0 6592 1819
Fax: (861) 0 6532 4346
E-mail: ernbbd@public.intercom.com.cn

Brazil

Mr Ruy Berger Filho
Secretary of Secondary and Professional Education,
Personal Representative of the Minister of Education
Ministry of Education
Esplanada dos Ministérios
Brasilia DF 70047 900, Brasil
Tel: (556) 1 410 86 46
Fax: (556) 1 410 96 41
E-mail: Ruyberger@sotec.mec.gov.br

Mrs Iara Gloria Areias Prado
Secretary of Fundamental Education, Ministry of
Education
Tel: (556) 1 410 86 17
Fax: (556) 1 410 92 69
E-mail: Iaraprado@mec.gov.br

Mr Cicero Silva Junior
Deputy-Secretary for Distance education, Ministry of
Education
Tel: (556) 1 410 88 85/410 80 96
Fax: (556) 1 410 91 58
E-mail: cicerojunior@mec.gov.br

Mrs Victoria Alice Cleaver
Minister-Head of International Co-operation Unit
Tel: (556) 1 410 88 36
Fax: (556) 1 410 92 29
E-mail: victoriacleaver@mec.gov.br

Mrs M.R. de Andrade Simoes
Chief of the Division of Educational Co-operation, Ministry
of External Relations

Mrs Mriangela Rebua
Head of the Division of Education Co-operation

Mr Affonso Celso de Ouro-Preto
Brazilian Ambassador to China
Brazilian Embassy
27 Guanghua Lu
Beijing 100600, China
Tel: (8610) 6532 2881 / 6532 2902
Fax: (8610) 6532 2751

Mr Byron A. dos Santos
Second Secretary of Brazilian Embassy

Mr Carlos E. da Cunha Oliveira
Third Secretary of Brazilian Embassy

China

Mrs Chen Zhili
Minister of Education
37, Damucang Hutong, Xidan
Beijing 100816
Tel: (8610) 6609 6249 / 6649
Fax: (8610) 6601 7912
E-mail: natcomcn@public3.bta.net.cn

Mr Wangzhan
Vice Minister of Education

Mr Zhang Xinsheng
Vice Minister of Education

Mr Li Lianning
Director General of Elementary Education Department
Ministry of Education

Mr Li Dongxiang
Director-General of International Affairs
Ministry of Education

Mr Wang Jianguo
Deputy Director-General of Elementary Education
Department
Ministry of Education

Mr Tian Xiaogang
Deputy Director-General of International Affairs
Ministry of Education

Mr Zhang Chongli
Secretary General of Chinese National Commission for
UNESCO
73 Damucangghutong
Beijing
Tel: (8610) 6609 6249
Fax: (8610) 6601 7912

Mr Yue Du
Director, Programme Division
Chinese National Commission for UNESCO

Prof. Xie Weihe
Vice President of Beijing Normal University
19 out-of-Xinjiekou Street
Beijing 100875
Tel: (8010) 6220 7960

Mr Ding Xingfu
Professor of China Central Television

Mrs Chen Yunying
Director of Special Education Research Section
China Institute for Education Research

Egypt

Mr Hussein Kamel Bahaa Eddine
Minister of Education
Ministry of Education
Silver Tower
12 Walked Street
Z. Code 836 Cairo
Tel: (202) 354 1005 / 354 2556

Mr Osama Mohamed Fattoh
Member of the Cabinet of the Minister of Education
Ministry of Education
Cairo
Tel: (202) 795 0422
Fax: (202) 796 2952

Mr Mohd Abd Elgawad Zamzam
T.D.C. Director (M.O.E.)
Tel: (202) 419 10 38
Fax: (202) 794 27 00
E-mail: Info@mail.org

Dr Mrs Nadia Gamal Eldin
Director of National Centre of Educational Research and
Development
Tel: (202) 588 33 59/60/61
Fax: (202) 588 33 62

Dr Hassan El-Bilawy
Zgazig University
Cairo
Tel: (202) 634 46 55
E-mail: Habilawi62@hotmail.com

Dr Mohamed Nooman Galal
Ambassador of Egypt to China
Egypt Embassy
2 Ritan Dong Lu, Jianguomenwai
Beijing, China
Tel: (8610) 6532 1825 / 1880 / 1920
Fax: (8610) 6532 5365

Mr Hamed Sakr
Information Councilor
Egypt Embassy

Eng. Abeer Ashour Hamza
Video conference TDC

Essam Sobhy Metwally
Video conference specialist

Walid El-Sayed El-Fakharany
Networking specialist TDC

Walid Abd-El-Rahim Abd-El-Latif
Technician-TDC

India

Dr Murli Manohar Joshi
Minister for Human Resource Development
Ministry of Human Resource Development
Government of India
Shastri Bhavan
New Delhi 110001
Tel: (9111) 378 26 98 / 338 7085 / 371 1068
Fax: (9111) 338 1355

Mr D.K. Kotia
Personal Secretary to Minister

Mr B.K. Chaturvedi
Secretary Department of Elementary Education and
Literacy

Mrs Kiran Aggarwal
Principal Education Advisor, Planning Commission

Mr Sumit Bose
Joint Secretary for Elementary Education

Prof. N.K. Ambhast
Chairman National Open School
National Open School
B-31B Kailash Colony
New Delhi 110048
Tel: (9111) 646 4102
Fax: 621 1453
E-mail: noscm@nda.vsnl.net.in

Prof B. P. Khandelwal
Director, Institute of Education Planning and
Administration

Mr Pranay Verma
First Secretary
Embassy of India
1, Ritan Dong Lu
Beijing 100600
Tel: (8610) 6532 1908

Indonesia

H.E. Prof. Dr Bambang Soehendro
Ambassador
Permanent Delegate of Indonesia to UNESCO
UNESCO House
1 rue Miollis
75732 Paris Cedex 15, France
Tel: (33) 1 4551 5956
E-mail: bsoehendro@hotmail.com

Dr Indra Djati Sidi
Director-General of Primary and Secondary Education
Ministry of National Education
JLM Sudirman
Jakarta
Tel: (6221) 572 5057
Fax: (6221) 572 5606

Dr Haris Iskandar
Staff of the Director-General of Primary and Secondary
Education
Ministry of National Education

Mr Agusti Anwar
Second Secretary
Indonesian Embassy
Sanlitun Diplomatic Office, Building B
Beijing 100600, China
Tel: (8610) 532 5379
Fax: (8610) 532 5368

Mexico

Dr Sylvia Ortega Salazar
Vice-Minister for Basic Educational Services

Mr Daniel Gonzalez
General Secretary, Mexican National Commission for
UNESCO
Tel: (525) 329 6940
Fax: (525) 329 6943
E-mail: dgri@sep.gob.mx

Mrs Isabel Farha
Assistant General Secretary, Mexican National
Commission for UNESCO
Tel: (525) 329 6948
Fax: (525) 329 6947
E-mail: ifarha@sep.gob.mx

Mr Guillermo Kelley
Director of the Latin American Institute of Educational
Communication (ILCE)
Tel: (525) 594 4061
Fax: (525) 594 9683
E-mail: gkelley@ilce.edu.mx

Nigeria

Prof. Abraham Borishade
Honorable Minister of Education Federal Ministry of
Education
Shedu Shagari Way
Maitama P.M.B. 146

Abuja
Tel: (234) 9523 2800
Fax: (234) 9523 7839

Mr Remi Ibitola
Ministerial Aide and Information Attaché
Federal Ministry of Education
Abuja

Mrs Amina Tane Ibrahim
Former Director, Coordinator, Universal Basic Education
Federal Ministry of Education
E-mail: csaccfa@hotmail.com

Prof. Gidado Tahir
National Co-ordinator, Universal Basic Education
Federal Ministry of Education

Prof. Jegede
Specialist in Distance Education
Federal Ministry of Education

Mr Tunde Olayode
Assistant Director
Policy Secretary, EFA Forum
Office of the Honorable Minister of Education
Federal Ministry of Education
E-mail: natcom.unesco@Arodjgy2000.com

H.E. Prof. Michael Omolewa
Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Nigeria to
UNESCO
UNESCO House
1 rue Miollis
75732 Paris Cedex 15
France
Tel: (33) 1 4568 2727
Fax: (33) 1 4567 5941
E-mail: dl.nigeria@unesco.org

Dr Deborah Egunyomi
Distance Education specialist
Department of Adult Education
University of Ibadan

Mr David Atunrase
President
Nigeria Union of Teachers
Tel: (234) 9882 2123
Fax: (234) 9523 7839

Mr Patrick Okoye
Ambassador of Nigeria to China
Embassy of Nigeria
2, Tung Wu Jie,
Sai Li Tun
Beijing, China
Tel: (8610) 532 2108 / 3631

Mr Tom Maiyashi
FC Member
Tel: (234) 9413 7833
Fax: (234) 9413 3988
E-mail: csacefa@hotmail.com

Olugbemi Jegede, Ph.D
Professor and Director, Centre for Research in Distance &
Adult Learning
The Open University of Hong Kong
30 Good Shepherd Street, Homatin, Kowloon
Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 2768 6700
Fax: (852) 2715 9042
E-mail: jegede@ouhk.edu.hk

Pakistan

Ms H.E. Zobaidda Jalal
Federal Minister for Education
Ministry of Education
Government of Pakistan
Pakistan Secretariat, Room 25, Block D
Islamabad
Tel: (9251) 921 20 20
Fax: (9251) 920 58 81

Mrs Shaheen Attiqur-Rehman
Minister for Literacy, Women Development, Social Welfare
and Special Education
Government of Punjab
226 Munir Road
Lahore
Tel: (9242) 921 0320
Fax: (9242) 666 1817

Mr Syed Imtiaz Hussain Gillani
Minister for Literacy, Women Development, Social welfare
and Special Education
Government of NWFP
Peshawar
Tel: (9251) 921 0894

Mrs Baela Jamil
Technical Adviser
Ministry for Education
Government of NWFP
Peshawar
Tel: (9251) 920 13 92 / 921 20 20
Fax: (9251) 920 13 92
E-mail: itacec2000@yahoo.com

Dr Muhammad Saleem
Assistant Educational Advisor
Ministry of Education
Tel: (9251) 920 10 27
Fax: (9251) 921 74 37

OBSERVERS

Russia Federation

Mr Nikolai Dmitriev
Head, Department for International Co-operation
Federal Ministry of Education
Ministry of Education
33 Shabolovka, Moscow
Tel: (7095) 954 6104
Fax: (7095) 954 5460

Mr Oleg Vasnetsov
Secretary General
National Commission of the Russian Federation for
UNESCO
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
32 - 34 Smolenskaya-Sennaya Square
121200 Moscow, G-200
Tel: (7095) 244 2400
Fax: (7095) 244 2475
E-mail: dksu@mid.ru

Iran

Dr Ahmad Jalali
Iran Ambassador and Permanent Delegate
Permanent Delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran to
UNESCO
UNESCO House
1 rue Miollis
75732 Paris Cedex 15, France
Tel: (33) 1 45 68 33 01
Fax: (33) 1 42 73 17 91

E-mail: a.jalali@unesco.org

Japan

Mr Tetsuhisa Shirakawa
Director-General for International Affairs
Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and
Technology (MEXT)
Secretary General
National Commission of Japan for UNESCO
Tel: (813) 3581 2174
Fax: (813) 5511 0845

Mr Takashi Asai
Assistant Director-General for International affairs
Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and
Technology (MEXT)
Tel: (813) 3581 2174
Fax: (813) 5511 0845

Canada

Mrs Cecilia Leung
Counsellor, Development Section
Canadian Embassy in China
19 Dongzhimenwai Dajie
Chao Yang
Beijing 100600, China
Tel: (8610) 6532 3536
Fax: (8610) 6532 4311
E-mail: Cecilia.feung@dfail-maeci.gc.ca

United Kingdom

Mr Gordon Slaven
First Secretary, Head of Education
British Embassy in China
3/4 F, Building 1 Landmark, Towers 8
Dongsanhuan Beilu
Beijing, 100004
Tel: (8610) 6590 6903
Fax: (8610) 6590 0977

UN AGENCIES

Mrs Kerstin Leitner
UN Resident Coordinator/UNDP Resident Representative
2 Liangmahe Nanlu
Beijing 100600, China
Tel : (8610) 6532 3731
Fax: (8610) 6532 2567
E-mail: registry.cn@undp.org

Mr Toshihiro Tanaka
Assistant UNDP Resident Representative

Mr Edwin Joe Judd
Representative, UNICEF China
12, Sanlitun Lu
Beijing, 100600, China
Tel: (8610) 65 32 37 31
Fax: (8610) 65 32 31 07
E-mail: ejudd@unicef.org

Mr Shao Potung
National Project Officer, UNICEF China
Tel: (8610) 6532 3131
Fax: (8610) 6532 3107
E-mail: p.shao@unicef.org

Mr Johnny K. Ramazani
Consultant, UNICEF China
E-mail:
Karabaye_Ramazani_at_PO135A01@smtplink.unicef.org

Mr Sven Burmester
UNFPA Representative in China
2 Liangmahe Nanlu
Beijing 100600, China
Tel: (8610) 6532 3737

Mr Edward Heneveld
Leader, World Bank New Delhi Office
70 Lodi Estate
New Delhi 110 003, India
Tel: (9111) 4617 241
Fax: (9111) 4776 391

Mr Richard Scuffield
Acting Country Director, The World Bank Resident Mission
in China
9th Flor, Building A, Fuhua Mansion
No. 8, Chaoyangmen Beidajie
Dongcheng District
Beijing 100027, China
Tel: (8610) 6554 3361
Fax: (8610) 6554 1686

Mr David Sobel
Senior Country Officer, Asian Development Bank PRC
Resident Mission
Tel: (8610) 6642 6600 till 6642 6605
Fax: (8610) 6554 1686

UNESCO

Headquarters

Mr Koïchiro Matsuura
Director-General of UNESCO

Sir John Sagar Daniel
Assistant Director-General for Education
Tel: (33) 1 4568 1047
Fax: (33) 1 4568 5627
E-mail: j.daniel@unesco.org

Mrs Haruko Makinouchi Hirose
Director, Bureau of Field Co-ordination
Tel: (33) 1 4568 1292
Fax: (33) 1 4568 5535
E-mail: h.hirose@unesco.org

Mr Wolfgang Vollmann
Chief a.i., Literacy and Non-Formal Education Section / E-
9 Initiative Co-ordinator, Basic Education Division
Tel: (33) 1 4568 2129
Fax: (33) 1 4568 5629
E-mail: w.vollmann@unesco.org

Ms Karine Brun
Associated Expert
E-9 Initiative, Basic Education Division
Tel: (33) 1 4568 2158
Fax: (33) 1 4568 5629
E-mail: k.brun@unesco.org

Ms Katarina Chalmovska
Assistant Programme Specialist
E-9 Initiative, Basic Education Division
Tel: (33) 1 4568 1152
Fax: (33) 1 4568 5629
E-mail: k.chalmovska@unesco.org

UNESCO Special Guest

Mrs Sonia Mendieta de Badaroux
Chairperson of the Executive Board of UNESCO
Tel: (33) 1 4568 2011
Fax: (33) 1 4568 5703
E-mail: S.Mendietadebadaroux@unesco.org

Field Offices

Mr Ansar Ali Khan
Director, UNESCO Bangladesh
GPO Box 57
Dhaka, Bangladesh
Tel: (8802) 912 3469 / 6522
Fax: (8802) 912 3468
E-mail: dhaka@unesco.org

Mrs Maria Dulce Almeida Borges
Coordinator, Education Sector, UNESCO Brazil
SAS, Quadra 5 - Bloco H - Lote 6
Ed. CNPq/IBICT/UNESCO, 9o andar
Brasília, DF 70070 914, Brazil
Tel: (5561) 3213 525
Fax: (5561) 3224 261
E-mail: md.borges@unesco.org.br

Mr Yasuyuki Aoshima
Director, UNESCO China
Jianguomenwai 5-15-3
Waijaogon gyu
Beijing, China
Tel: (8610) 6532 1725
Fax: (8610) 6532 4854
E-mail: y.aoshima@memo.unesco.org

Mrs Maki Hayashikawa
Officer-in-charge/Education Officer, UNESCO China
E-mail: m.hayashikawa@memo.unesco.org

Mrs Sun Lei
National Programme Officer for Education, UNESCO
Beijing
E-mail: l.sun@memo.unesco.org

Mr Mohamed El-Deek
Director, UNESCO Egypt
8 Abdel-Rahman Fahmy Street
Garden City
Cairo 11511, Egypt
Tel: (2023) 543 036
Fax: (2023) 545 296
E-mail: m.el-deek@memo.unesco.org

Mrs Gholam Ghada
Programme Specialist, UNESCO Egypt
E-mail: g.gholam@memo.unesco.org

Mr Mohsen Tawfik
Director, UNESCO India
8 Poorvi Marg Vasant Vishar
New Delhi 110057, India
Tel: (9111) 614 0038
Fax: (9111) 614 3351
E-mail: m.tawfik@memo.unesco.org

Dr (Mrs) Latika Padgaonkar
National Information Officer, UNESCO India
E-mail: l.padgaonkar@memo.unesco.org

Mr Stephen Craig Hill
Director, UNESCO Indonesia
P.O. Box 1273/JKT
Jakarta 10002, Indonesia
Tel: (6221) 314 1308
Fax: (6221) 315 0382
E-mail: s.hill@memo.unesco.org

Mr Sheldon Shaeffer
Director, UNESCO Bangkok
P.O. Box 967
Prakanong Post Office
Bangkok 10110, Thailand
Tel: (662) 391 0577
Fax: (662) 391 0866

E-mail: s.shaffer@unesco-proap.org

Mrs Ingeborg Brienes
Director, UNESCO Pakistan
P.O. Box 2034
Islamabad 44000, Pakistan
Tel: (9251) 2829 452
Fax: (9251) 2825 341
E-mail: i.breines@memo.unesco.org

Mrs Anjum Riyazul Haque
Officer in charge, UNESCO Pakistan
E-mail: ahaque@un.org.pk

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- Mohammed Abd-El-Mone Im Khalifa, El Gornhoreya newspaper, Egypt
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