



United Nations Educational, Scientific  
and Cultural Organization



The Newsletter  
of UNESCO's  
Education Sector

# Education TODAY

## EDUCATING RURAL PEOPLE: A LOW PRIORITY

### INSIDE

#### LEARNING WORLD



School feeding in Mali, p. 2

#### FOCUS



Educating rural people, p. 4

#### EDUCATION FOR ALL



New lease of life for E-9, p. 8

#### BRIEFS



Education initiatives  
around the world, p. 10

If Education for All is to become a reality, education systems will have to reach out to those who live in remote rural areas. But are governments really committed to educating rural people and can they overcome the complex problems involved? Focus, a 4-page dossier, reports.

### EDITO

When people ask me how we are doing in achieving Education for All (EFA), I reply that although many countries still have far to go, the organization of the campaign is in good shape. There is now excellent international teamwork between the four key groups of stakeholders: developing country governments, civil society organizations, bilateral donors and inter-governmental agencies. Coordination at the country level has also improved and the players increasingly work within a common framework, led by the country itself, rather than each doing their own thing.

The various agencies now divide up the work; each focusing on a part of the EFA agenda that plays to its strengths. The World Bank manages the Fast-Track Initiative (FTI) to promote the universal completion of primary education. After a hesitant start, the FTI has emerged as a core response to the EFA challenge. UNICEF is coordinating the drive to gender parity in schools and universal girls' education.

Achieving EFA means going to where the greatest numbers of unschooled and uneducated people are. This takes us to South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa and, in particular, to the rural areas of those vast regions. *Education Today*, in this issue, looks at the challenge of bringing education to rural people in the face of the widespread discrimination, witting and unwitting, against those living outside cities.

As I travel around the world I do see many encouraging developments. Most of them, not surprisingly, are the result of giving power to rural people. Some states of India, such as Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, are making brisk progress towards EFA because the local councils, or *Panchayat*, have been put in charge. National political will is another key ingredient. China, for example has placed education and communications at the centre of its policy for developing the western part of the country. When I visited Oman I noted the determination of the government to ensure that schools were built and staffed to the same specifications all over the country.

UNESCO encourages all countries to combine national will with local power in the service of rural people. For decades to come 60 per cent of the world's population will be found in rural areas. Humankind depends on them and they depend on education.

John Daniel

Assistant Director-General for Education

# Hungry minds

A programme that provides a meal in school is boosting enrolment in Mali, especially of girls

Sounds of laughter and games fill the desert air in this scorching November day. The children of Kadji primary school in northern Mali are out to play. The noise level is rising steadily until suddenly all is quiet. The bell has rung. It is time to eat.

The children gather in groups of fifteen under trees and one of their comrades sets a large metal bowl containing rice and peas in the centre. Twenty large bowls are thus distributed to the schoolchildren. Thanks to the UNESCO/World Food Programme (WFP) School Feeding Programme pupils in Gao, Kidal, Tombouctou and Mopti in northern Mali receive a meal a day in school. "These regions are particularly poverty-stricken and many parents struggle to give their families a daily meal," says Edouard Matoko, Director of UNESCO Bamako.

## Low enrolment

In this extremely poor part of Mali, the dominant economic activity – subsistence agriculture – relies for the most part on difficult climatic conditions. The region is desert or semi-desert and the Sahara is steadily inch-

ing further south. Enrolment is the lowest in the country, where the national average was only 61 per cent in 2000. This can be partly explained by the fact that some children have to walk nine or ten km each way.

Almost 90,000 children in these regions where food insecurity is a problem benefit from the programme. Dry rations are delivered to schools and local women are trained to cook the meals and calculate the calories that every child should receive. "We are preparing these communities to rely on themselves," says Alain Mubalama, Chief of the WFP offices of Gao and Kidal. "They take care of the everyday running of the programme and give what they can to make it work – usually firewood and meat."

## Incentives to girls

For those who have a fair distance to cover on foot every day, a meal in school is a great incentive to attend regularly. "Before, many of our children had to return home to eat at midday and several didn't go back in the afternoon," says one father. "Now they go to school regularly and stay all day."

An important aim of the programme is to boost girls' enrolment, which in the northern regions is less than 50 per cent. Girls who attend regularly are given 10 litres of cooking oil three times a year – an extremely expensive item in the family budget. "Now girls are coming regularly," says one teacher. "Previously, they were enrolled in school but didn't always show up."

Although she is married, Aminata, 15, comes to school every day, proof that attitudes are changing. In many African countries early marriage and pregnancy put an end to girls' schooling. "Girls don't work as well as boys in class because they know that sooner or later they'll have to leave to marry," says one teacher. Once Aminata leaves school, she hopes to go to nursing school in Gao, eight km away. And her husband agrees, she says.

A meal in school is making the difference. Enrolment in Kadji primary school increased by a third between 2000 and 2003, and girls' enrolment shot up by 50 per cent.

## Parents gain too

Illiterate parents are already finding that their children can be a considerable help to them even before finishing school. "Before, we had to pay someone to read our letters or even go to Gao to find someone," says one parent. "Now that every family has at least one child in school, they can read their own letters and write back. This in itself is an argument in favour of school."

With an uncertain future ahead, parents are beginning to believe that sending their children to school could actually improve families' prospects in the long-term. "Now we're sure that our children who are in school will be able to stop the desert from advancing further and they'll bring happiness to our community," says one parent.

Contacts: Edouard Matoko, UNESCO Bamako  
E-mail: [f.matoko@unesco.org](mailto:f.matoko@unesco.org); and  
Ute Meir, UNESCO Paris  
E-mail: [u.meir@unesco.org](mailto:u.meir@unesco.org)



©UNESCO/Teresa Murtagh

A meal in school encourages children to attend regularly

# Learning on the hilltops

Villagers in Bhutan take advantage of skills and literacy training



©Hagen von Bloh

Bringing business development to the remote Chungpel village

**D**echen, a 20-year-old girl lives in Chungpel, a remote Himalayan village in the tiny Kingdom of Bhutan. She weaves yatha, traditional intricately-patterned and brilliantly-coloured wool cloth to supplement her family's meagre livelihood from subsistence farming. Together with most other women in Chungpel, population 263, Dechen regularly makes the three-hour trek down the mountain to the only road, the national East-West highway. Here she barter her production for rice, weaving materials or other manufactured goods. But Dechen's daily life has changed in the past year.

## Learning new skills

Thanks to a UNESCO pilot project, Dechen has boosted her literacy level and her ability to earn a living in one of the world's least developed economies. She was one of 223 people from three rural communities – Chungpel, Tsaidang and Rukubji – who signed up for the Village Education and Basic Skills Development Programme. A co-operative venture with Bhutan's royal government, combining the efforts of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources (MoLHR), it was designed to deliver an integrated package of non-formal education and training, with instruction in the national language, Dzongkha.

“The innovative aspect is that the programme links literacy and skills training, which currently are organized separately by two different ministries,” explains UNESCO project coordinator Margarete Sachs-Israel.

## Business development

While acquiring skills in weaving, tailoring, carpentry and furniture making (a preliminary survey determined learning demands), villagers also improved their reading, writing and counting, and attended workshops in basic entrepreneurship. Most of the participants were under 30, like Dechen, with some formal education, but no previous introduction to market economy opportunities. In addition, the programme trained literacy and skills teachers, developed teaching materials and provided each village with the means to build a Community Learning Centre (CLC), to add to the country's growing network of them.

For Dechen, the programme meant going every day for six weeks to the Centre for advanced training in yatha weaving. She also took classes in tailoring, and developed a more sophisticated sense of product design and quality.

In the entrepreneurial workshop, she learned how to set up an accounts book – no more bartering – and how to think up new products for different clients. Now, reports Programme Officer Tandin Dorji from Bhutan's MoLHR, “Dechen plans to open a roadside co-operative yatha weaving shop, with support from the Bhutan Development Finance Corporation based in her district.”

## A showpiece

According to Dorji, the project has been a model and a showpiece in Bhutan and he would like to see it extended to the country's some 3,200 villages.

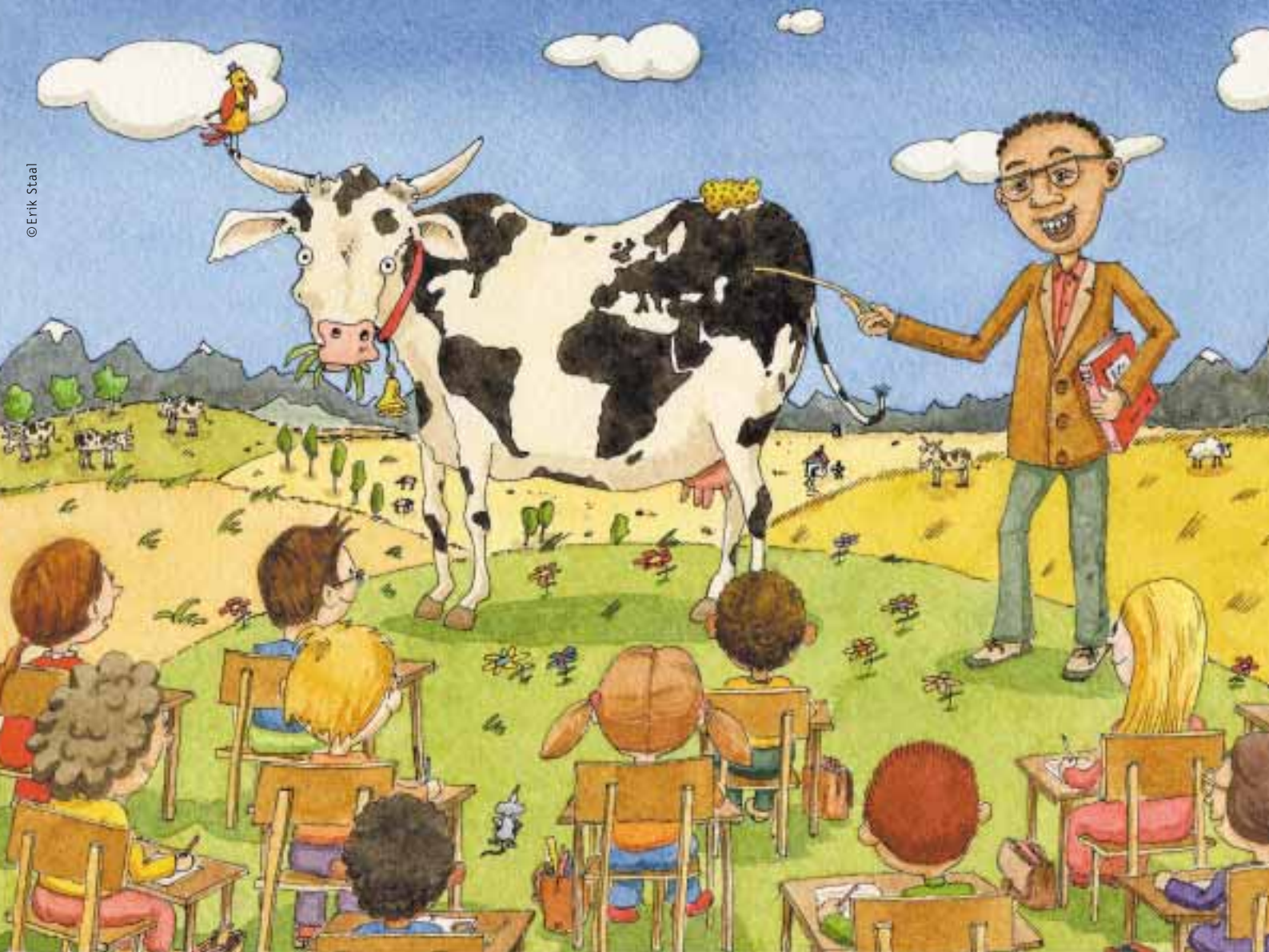
The pilot project was small-scale (total budget \$80,000, provided by Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA)), and its approach was “appropriate, effective and responded to learner demand,” according to evaluator Clinton Robinson. The evaluation shows that expanding the programme could significantly alleviate Bhutan's rural poverty. It can promote the almost non-existent private sector, create jobs and meet the educational needs of women, young drop-outs and other marginalized groups.

Contact: Margarete Sachs-Israel, UNESCO Paris  
E-mail: [m.sachs-israel@unesco.org](mailto:m.sachs-israel@unesco.org)

## Life in Chungpel

Chungpel is about a day's journey from the Bhutanese capital of Thimphu. There is no electricity or telephone but the village has a clinic, a community school and a dynamic village development committee linked to regional authorities. After centuries of isolationism, Bhutan began to enter the modern era in the 1960s, when the government adopted a cautious but determined approach to development. There have been vast gains in democracy, per capita income, health, education and infrastructure, but because of the country's formidable geography, rural areas – where more than 80 per cent of Bhutan's 700,000 citizens live – are slow to benefit. While the country's overall literacy rate was an estimated 54 per cent in 2003, it is still less than 40 per cent in a village such as Chungpel.

# Educating rural people:



© Erik Staal

**T**oday in many parts of the world, growing up in a rural region often means growing up without a decent education. School attendance is generally low and drop-out high, with girls, mountain populations and ethnic minorities losing out most. This is not surprising, considering the distance many children have to walk daily, only to find a school in poor condition, without furniture, learning materials, drinking water or toilets, and sometimes even without a teacher.

Rural people are often caught in the vicious cycle of having no access to the services and opportunities that might lift them out of poverty – education, gainful employment, adequate nutrition, infrastructure and communications. The upshot is that over 70 per cent of the world's 1.2 billion poorest people – those living on less than a dollar a day – live in rural areas and 85 per cent of them are concentrated in thirty-five countries spread across Africa, Asia and Latin America.

“There is evidently a lack of political interest in the rural world,” points out Aicha Bah-Diallo, Deputy Assistant Director-General of UNESCO's Education Sector and Director of the Division of Basic Education. “In many cases, legislators don't assess rightfully the importance of education for rural people in the development of their countries.”

This indifference towards rural people is the result of a strong urban bias on the part of politicians and policy-makers. “Rural people

# a low priority

Access to quality education in rural areas has been consistently neglected. Many governments either lack the political will or the capacity to meet the educational needs of the huge numbers of rural people who remain outside the mainstream education system.

have no real political voice, so when there is competition for limited resources – and education for remote areas can be costly – they tend to lose out”, says Lavinia Gasperini, Senior Officer at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Abhimanyu Singh, Director of UNESCO’s Division of International Coordination and Monitoring for Education for All, puts the problem down to inefficiencies in the delivery system, which he attributes to “excessive centralization, lack of transparency and weak accountability.”

## Key to rural development

Lack of access to quality education in rural areas is not a new problem, but it has been consistently neglected. Yet, over 60 per cent of the world’s poor will still live in rural areas twenty years from now, and this figure is not expected to decrease even with unprecedented increases in global standards of living and rapid urbanization in many developing countries.

“Education for rural people lies at the heart of rural development and this is fundamental for reducing poverty worldwide,” comments David Atchoarena, Senior Programme Specialist at the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP).

It is an accepted fact that rural people with basic education are more likely to adopt new technology and become more productive, and can deal better with change. For example, a World Bank study indicates that increasing women’s primary schooling could boost agricultural output by 24 per cent.

However, there are no quick fixes for providing education to the rural poor; this requires a long-term effort and commitment, with

concerted action at the local, national and international level. (see box)

## Access denied

One major challenge for education in rural areas is under-enrolment. According to the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4*, it is estimated that a mere 1 per cent of girls and 1.6 per cent of boys in rural Ethiopia completed the eight-year primary cycle in 2000. According to a UNICEF survey of forty-one countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America covering the period 1990-1995, almost half of the countries showed a rural-urban gap of 20 percentage points or more. For instance, in Burkina Faso, 75 per cent of primary school-age children in urban areas attend school, whereas only 26 per cent in rural areas do. The country has now adopted a ten-year plan for basic education, aiming to increase school enrolment nationwide.

Despite the costly and complex nature of rural development some countries are addressing these problems and showing positive results. For example in Cuba, which has implemented strategies for children living in isolated areas, there are no significant differences in academic achievement between rural and urban areas.

In China, where more than 60 per cent of the population of 1.3 billion live in rural areas, the government is increasingly focussing on education in disadvantaged zones. “Rural education used to be the weakest part of our education system,” explains the Chinese Minister of Education Zhou Ji, “but now that’s changed”. The country adopted a series of measures that included more money, more teachers and more schools for rural areas, developing information technology to link urban and rural school systems, providing financial aid to students from the poorest families, and

## A flagship initiative for the education of rural people

Recognition of the link between education, rural people and development led to the launch of the flagship initiative on education for rural people at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, (Johannesburg, 2002). This new initiative is one of nine flagship programmes to tackle specific challenges in achieving Education for All.

The initiative by UNESCO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (the lead agency) aims to drive home the importance of educating rural people for eradicating poverty and hunger. The flagship is building partnerships among those working in agriculture, rural development and education, bringing together governments and policy-makers, international organizations, donors and NGOs, academics and grass-roots practitioners. So far, the flagship counts eighty-six members, most of which are NGOs.

As part of the programme, FAO and the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) have jointly produced (2003) a global study *Education for Rural Development: Towards New Policy Responses*, and are now preparing a publication on indicators for monitoring in this field as well as guidelines for planners.

The flagship is also helping governments to adjust their national education plans to meet the learning needs of rural people (e.g. in Mozambique and Kosovo). Nine national case studies on educating rural people were conducted in the Balkans and Latin America. Regional meetings for policy-makers in education and agriculture have been organized in Asia and Latin America, and one is planned for Africa.

More information on: [www.unesco.org/education/efa](http://www.unesco.org/education/efa) and [www.fao.org/ed/erp](http://www.fao.org/ed/erp)

# Educating rural people: a low priority

→ attracting teachers by converting their status from *min-ban* (locally hired) to *gong-ban* (state hired), which meant higher salaries and benefits (e.g. pensions, housing and health care).

## Community schools

There is also evidence that more and more villages in developing countries now have a school that is within walking distance and that more teachers are living in the villages. This progress is the result of both decentralization efforts in recent years and local initiatives involving many players, including NGOs and donors.

For example, Mali, confronted with enormous problems in education in the early 1980s (72 per cent illiteracy and primary school enrolment of 50 per cent), developed its first community schools for primary education. From 176 schools in the mid-1990s, the country counted a network of

1,428 in 1998/99 – representing almost a third of primary schools in Mali. Most of these schools, founded and run by local communities and approved by the national government, receive financial and technical support from a variety of NGOs, including Save the Children and World Education. “The role of NGOs has been very important,” says Atchoarena. “They are often the only ones present to fill the education void in rural areas, and have built up much expertise at the local level.” But governments cannot escape from the fact that it is their responsibility to provide free and compulsory primary education. NGOs cannot be left alone to play this vital role.

## How much decentralization?

When governments decide to get involved one of the most widely implemented – and debated – strategies to bring education to rural areas is decentralization. But it can also pose certain risks. It may foster

inequity and create confusion about who is in the driver’s seat. Successful decentralization relies on sufficient local capacity and correctly targeted resources. “It’s not enough to decentralize responsibilities,” says Gasperini, “resources also have to be decentralized.”

In the 1990s, the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh decentralized education and adopted a scheme to universalize primary schooling. Based on the premise of “a primary school within a kilometre”, the Education Guarantee Scheme pledges to provide a primary school within ninety days of public demand in any rural hamlet with forty children and no educational facility. The community provides a qualified teacher and space. Today, all primary school-age children in the State have access to schooling. “The provision of demand-based education facilities through decentralized decision-making is an important step in providing access in backward rural areas,” says Singh. “A serious challenge is supervising these additional schools and maintaining quality.”

## The role of incentives

While the number of schools – and their accessibility – is a crucial factor for developing education for rural people, other major factors are quality and relevance. “Unless rural people can be convinced that education will better their lives and those of their children, they may not think it worthwhile to make the necessary effort and sacrifices,” says Atchoarena.

To encourage families to keep their children in school, a number of countries are providing parents with incentives. For example, in Brazil, 25 per cent of all school-age children (or 10 million out of 40 million) receive the *Bolsa Escola*, which is a nationwide education grant scheme that pays families a monthly stipend so that their children can attend school and stay there. In Niger, for example, enrolment increased in areas with a school canteen and girls’ enrolment shot up from 34 per cent to 41 per cent over four years.

→

## A centre for rural development

The International Research and Training Centre for Rural Education (INRULED) was founded in 1994 in Baoding, in China’s Hebei province. Its aim: to boost social and economic development in rural areas through education.

“Educating rural people is facing critical challenges, such as poverty, lack of qualified teachers and urban-biased curricula,” says Dr Zhai Haihun, Director of INRULED.

The centre, which is affiliated to UNESCO, focuses mainly on training and research and places special emphasis on South-South cooperation. In the ten years of its existence, it has conducted some thirty-two research projects. One comparative study looked at how education serves rural development in ten countries (Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines) and resulted in a publication *Education for Rural Transformation*. Another project focuses on rural teachers, and in particular the relationship between quality teaching and the salary level of Chinese teachers.

A vivid example of South-South cooperation is the fellowship grants awarded to scholars from developing countries. During a four-week stay in China, these scholars visit educational institutions and share experiences with Chinese scholars. They are then required to write a paper comparing Chinese education with that of their home country. African education personnel working on rural education receive fellowships to attend advanced training workshops.

Since 1999, the Centre has opened two affiliate centres in Nanjing and Gansu.

More on INRULED on: [www.inruled.org](http://www.inruled.org)

→ Another crucial issue is that the curriculum must be relevant to rural people's needs and taught in a language they use; this is especially true in regions where there are many different ethnic groups and languages. One approach is to rely more on available local skills and talent, to recruit and train teaching staff in villages, and to develop curricula that combine core content with local content.

An interesting example is Argentina's Third Cycle of Basic Education for Rural Schools that combined national basic content with specific learning materials for rural schools. These were distributed to rural teachers, who also received training. "The programme greatly improved the access and quality of education in the poor rural areas," says Cecilia Braslavsky, Director of the UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE).

"The challenge of developing a good curriculum for rural environments is not one of 'adapting' contents to rural life," she adds. "The real question," Braslavsky says, "is how to define at national – and perhaps at world level – key competences that make sense to everybody in an ever more inter-dependent world."

### Monitoring progress

While it is clear that in many parts of the world, education for rural people is becoming more of an issue and getting more attention, how far this is going and in what direction it is moving globally remains to be seen. Most countries keep national statistics but these are not internationally comparable. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics is currently working on how to measure regional disparities. One of its projects in seventeen countries, including Brazil, China

## Multigrade schools: a rural solution

Multigrade schools are often the only way to ensure quality education in rural and remote areas with low and scattered populations. Today, 30 per cent of classrooms worldwide are multigrade. But despite their growing numbers, government administrators often ignore these schools and they are rarely reported in statistics and educational research, according to a new study *Multigrade Schools: Improving Access in Rural Africa?* published by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning.

"The choice in favour of multigrade schools is often a choice between education or no education," stress Etienne Brunswic and Jean Valérien, authors of the study. "They are not a second-class solution."

In most cases, multigrade education has been developed by necessity. Europe and North America were able to achieve universal primary education largely through multigrade schools. Many countries in Latin America and Asia are achieving success with the multigrade approach, which is increasing enrolment, improving performance and reducing absenteeism in rural areas. One example is the *Escuela Nueva* programme in Colombia, which increased enrolment in rural areas by 45 per cent between 1988 and 1996. In India, two thirds of primary schools are multigrade.

Ironically, while multigrade classes could be a solution for educating rural people in many African countries, governments tend to focus on improving conventional schools, often leaving the development of multigrade schools to local initiative. For this reason, multigrade schools in rural Africa tend to show poor results, which in turn give them a negative image.

Since 1999, UNESCO's International Institute for Capacity-Building in Africa (IICBA) has been working on a multigrade programme in Ethiopia to develop working models for education in remote rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa. Five schools have been built so far.

More information on: [www.unesco-iicba.org](http://www.unesco-iicba.org)

and India, is looking at who gets access to quality education, and how human and financial resources are distributed at the sub-national level.

Another project looks at how the supply of teachers and investment per pupil as well as the socio-economic status of households affect learning achievement in urban and rural schools.

The extent to which mainstream education can meet the needs of rural people is put into question. Currently education systems are catering for 84 per cent of primary school-age children. The challenge for governments is how to educate the last 16 per cent – those who are the most difficult to reach. ●

## New lease of life for E-9

The initiative falls short on collaboration, but progress on EFA goals is evident

**E**ducation ministers from the world's nine high population countries – Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan – got one bad mark on their report card at their last meeting in December in Cairo. Countries had not collaborated enough on Education for All goals, concluded an external evaluation of the first decade of the E-9 Initiative. Was it time to stop there?

The answer was a resounding “No”. Members vowed instead to revitalize and realign it. Alvaro Luiz Vereda de Oliveira, Second Secretary of Brazil's Permanent Delegation to UNESCO, explains, “More than ever our countries need a space for sharing problems and policies, and the feedback and coordination of an international group.”

As a result, UNESCO is now creating a new framework to enhance future cooperation (see interview on this page). Other actions will include broadening partnerships, promoting technical cooperation, and improving the collection and analysis of data.

### Promising trends

The E-9 Initiative, an education drive launched in Delhi in 1993, aims to drum up support for the EFA challenge within the countries whose performance strongly affects global EFA trends. It commits these nine countries, whose 3.2 billion people represent half the world's population, to work together to meet basic learning needs as well as to reduce population growth by 2015.

Positive achievement in the first ten years is evident and encouraging: educational trends have improved significantly. All E-9 countries are expanding access to early childhood care and education. Brazil and Mexico are at the point of achieving universal primary education, and China, Egypt and Indonesia all report that over 90 per cent of primary school-age children are in school.

Enrolment at secondary level also increased in all countries with data, except Pakistan.



© UNESCO/Luis Alberto

More than 60 per cent of secondary school-age children – the average for developing countries – were enrolled in Brazil, China, Egypt and Mexico in 2000. Bangladesh, Brazil and Indonesia have reached gender parity,

and Egypt is close. Tertiary-level enrolment is higher everywhere, though still representing only a small number of students.

### Spin-off collaborations

Adult literacy rates have improved, particularly for women. Bangladesh, China, India and Indonesia have made the most remarkable progress, and it is no coincidence that the same countries also register the largest decrease in population growth rates. Spin-off collaborations on EFA issues initiated by several countries – such as the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Brazil and Nigeria to exchange best practices – are promising.

Despite these hopeful signs, E-9 countries still face daunting challenges. Their populations account for more than 40 per cent of the world's out-of-school children and 70 per cent of illiterate adults.

**Contact:** [Abhimanyu Singh, UNESCO Paris](mailto:abh.singh@unesco.org)  
**E-mail:** [abh.singh@unesco.org](mailto:abh.singh@unesco.org)

## 3 questions on the E-9

Interview with Abhimanyu Singh, Director of UNESCO's Division of International Coordination and Monitoring for EFA

### 1 Ten years after its launch, what is the relevance of the E-9 Initiative?

The logic behind the E-9 initiative is that to improve the situation of Education for All worldwide, you have to make a difference in the nine high population countries. It is important that we keep the nine countries engaged and get the political leadership on education together. I think these countries have come much closer and understand the challenges in different continents. One value is that it is perhaps the only small international group that cuts across regions.

### 2 What impact has the E-9 Initiative had in the high population countries?

These countries have many lessons for others about governance and management of huge

education systems and initiatives in open and distance learning. In the past ten years we have seen tremendous economic growth in some of these countries, particularly China, India and Brazil, so they have emerged as important global players. It's difficult to make a direct correlation with the E-9 Initiative, but the voice of the E-9 is more influential.

I think these countries are also going to influence the data issues a lot. People are really concerned with the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* classifying countries by performance and making predictions about achievement of the EFA goals. This engagement should lead to improvement back home as well as pressure on UNESCO to get the most accurate and up-to-date statistics.





## The Big Lobby takes off

Over 100 countries have signed up for the Big Lobby – this year’s EFA Week campaign for out-of-school children (19-25 April). By participating in the Big Lobby, children will be calling on governments to ensure that all children get an education of good quality. They will lobby at national parliaments on 20 April; write to their Heads of State or Prime Ministers; create a map of their neighbourhood showing the houses that have children not in school; and invite politicians to visit their schools.

But EFA Week will see other novel events. UNESCO offices around the world will be organizing a ‘walk to school’ event to draw attention to one of the major barriers to schooling – distance. Field staff, accompanied by personalities and the media, will walk to school with a group of children from a village a fair distance away.

Visit the following websites for accounts of the other planned events: [www.unesco.org/education/efaweek2004](http://www.unesco.org/education/efaweek2004) and [www.campaignforeducation.org](http://www.campaignforeducation.org)

## World tour

→ UNESCO Beirut convened the Arab Regional Conference of Ministers of Education on EFA – “EFA National Plans: What’s Next?” (20-23 January) – to draw lessons from national plans and elaborate a joint Arab vision on future action.

→ Education ministers from the fifteen Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) met in Accra 9-10 January, to examine “Education and Subregional Integration: Our Commitments and Perspectives”, and to develop an ECOWAS education strategy.

→ UNESCO and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) held a workshop for Education Ministers of the CEMAC zone on 15 and 16 January, aimed at mobilizing their efforts.

→ Ministers and deputy ministers from South Asian countries met on 4 and 5 December 2003 in Islamabad, Pakistan, to discuss subregional cooperation in education.

→ UNESCO’s Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura addressed the Meeting of Pacific Ministers of Education on 29 January in Samoa. Participants debated ways to overcome obstacles to quality Education for All.

→ The second gathering of Latin American Civil Society aiming to influence education policy took place in Bolivia, 11 to 13 December 2003. Debate kicked off with a paper analysing research on quality in six Latin American countries.

→ India, with the US Department of Labor and the International Labour Organization (ILO), launched a \$40 million programme aimed at eliminating child labour, on 16 February. The programme targets 80,000 children in ten hazardous industries.

→ To promote EFA goals, the UNESCO and UNICEF offices in Latin America will award three Annual Regional EFA Prizes, starting in 2004, rewarding a government educational initiative, one by an NGO, and one by a school and community.

## Understanding on funding

It is now almost a tradition. Once a year, UNESCO’s education staff set their sights on developing projects to assist countries in providing education for all (EFA). The best projects – those most in line with the programme ‘Capacity-Building for EFA’ – are funded and implemented. In 2003, twenty-four projects were selected for funding from a new UNESCO multi-donor account.

Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden are spearheading a new funding mechanism by agreeing to channel funds for capacity-building for EFA through this account. A Memorandum

of Understanding, signed in November 2003, formalized this accord. In 2003, the Nordic countries’ contribution totalled \$5 million.

“Our screening exercise to come up with the best projects was probably the most serious process we have ever used in the Education Sector,” says UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education John Daniel. The projects being financed include schools for street and working children, promoting gender equality through curriculum reform and building the capacity of NGOs to influence educational planning.

Was the shift for donors from a bilateral to a multi-lateral approach a difficult one? “It was more like a growing understanding and a learning process,” says Tor Gjerde of NORAD, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. “The old system simply didn’t work.” Most parties agree today that the previous approach of financing a series of small projects was too fragmented and inefficient. On top of that, countries spent too much energy trying to meet donors’ reporting demands. “Today countries meet the donors just once a year,” says Margareta Husen of SIDA, the Swedish International Aid Agency.

Another innovation is the general shift from the funding of small projects to building the capacity of education systems. Donor countries are in “a programme and theme frame of mind: strengthening policies rather than building crèches,” adds Daniel.

For UNESCO, the multi-donor account undeniably makes more sense. “It ensures that we support areas in our programme that need more resources,” says Svein Osttveit of UNESCO.

Contact: Svein Osttveit, UNESCO Paris  
E-mail: [s.osttveit@unesco.org](mailto:s.osttveit@unesco.org)

### 3 Given that E-9 countries had not cooperated enough in the past, what will be UNESCO’s action now?

The evaluation was flawed in its methodology but it served a purpose. It was critical of the initiative as a framework for collaboration between the countries. But the countries think it is valuable and said, “We’re here to stay as a combination and you’d better pay more attention to us.”

We have decided to strengthen the administrative structure. A secretariat in one country will rotate every two years, and be responsible for follow-up to ministerial meetings. In addition, each of the nine countries will have a focal point, working on E-9 continuously.

## Asia's grim record

Of the 46 million children out-of-school in South and East Asia, 32 million of them live in the countries of South and West Asia, according to a recent report by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

The *South and East Asia Regional Report* presents the latest education data for twenty-two countries, ranging from the Philippines in the east to Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran in the west, and including five of the world's high population nations.

The Report reveals that while more children are attending school than ever before in the countries of South and East Asia, vast numbers of them drop out before the end of the primary cycle, which is why the region still accounts for the world's largest share of out-of-school children.

The statistics show that enrolment for boys and girls rose substantially in most countries over the decade from 1990 to 2000. But enrolment figures reveal just part of the story. Only half of the children who enter primary school in India, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar will reach Grade 5.

**Contact: Anuja Singh, UIS**  
**E-mail: a.singh@unesco.org**

## Reversing the brain drain

UNESCO and Hewlett-Packard (HP) have joined forces to help reduce the massive brain drain of young scientists from South East Europe.

Delivering the latest GRID Computing equipment, donated by HP, to universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia and Montenegro is the first phase of the project "Piloting Solutions for Alleviating Brain Drain in South East Europe".

The new technology will allow these universities to introduce distance learning courses and embark on joint research, working closely with nationals living abroad and thus tapping into the knowledge and expertise of the scientific diaspora from the three countries.

Among proposed initiatives, the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Split will develop an interactive website to allow Croatian physicists at home and abroad to access and share information and data. The Faculty of Electrical Engineering of the University of Belgrade is launching a pilot e-Lab experiment with Serbian scientists in Switzerland. The Faculty of Electrical Engineering of the University of Podgorica is starting a website linking scientists from Montenegro who left in the past decade with those who stayed.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Sarajevo and the Faculty of Electrical Engineering of the University of Serb Sarajevo will introduce distance learning courses by working with their fellow nationals based abroad.

Following the pilot projects, UNESCO intends to extend the programme to other parts of the world hit by brain drain.

**Contact: Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic, UNESCO Paris**  
**Email: s.uvalic-trumbic@unesco.org**

## Partnerships under scrutiny

A key reason for slow progress in achieving Education for All is a lack of meaningful partnerships between international agencies and countries. That is the conclusion of *Local Solutions to Global Challenges: Towards Effective Partnership in Basic Education*, the first comprehensive evaluation of aid to basic education, covering 1990 to 2002.

"There is a tendency to think that sector-wide approaches are what is needed for agencies and governments to work together," explains Lene Buchert, UNESCO's Chief of Section for Primary Education. "The evaluation is challenging that."

What is often missing, says the report, is the determination to improve basic education through locally developed solutions. Too much reliance on "blueprints, templates and prescribed solutions" is detrimental to the relevance of programmes to local needs and capacities. And local feedback is not a consistent ingredient.

The evaluation also found that while external support has helped expand access to basic

education, the focus on formal primary education has reduced attention and funding to adult literacy and other out-of-school education programmes.

The evaluation, a two-year endeavour completed in 2003, provides a better understanding of obstacles to EFA. It was supported by a unique partnership between thirteen international and national funding and technical assistance organizations and four partner countries – Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Uganda and Zambia.

**Contact: Lene Buchert, UNESCO Paris**  
**E-mail: l.buchert@unesco.org**

## Africa's teacher shortage

In 1987, there were 73 million children at African school desks; in 2001, the figure had increased to 106 million. If African countries are to meet the goal of universal primary education, their school systems will have to enrol nearly 180 million children in 2015.

To cope with this huge challenge, the number of teachers must increase at an even higher rate than the number of pupils, according to the report *The Issue of Teaching Staff and Universal Primary Enrolment in 2015 in the ECOWAS, CEMAC, and PALOPs Countries*.\*

The average annual rate of increase in the number of school teachers in Africa need only rise from 2.3 per cent to 2.5 per cent until 2015 to keep up with demand. But these figures – which include North Africa and South Africa – obscure considerably bigger challenges for the three sub-Saharan African zones. The growth rate has to nearly double in the ECOWAS countries, triple in the PALOPs countries and more than quadruple in CEMAC countries.

Even with the international community's pledges of support, Education for All objectives represent huge hurdles for the poorest countries, emphasizes the report published by the *Pôle de Dakar*, a French Cooperation Initiative, and UNESCO Dakar.

\* Economic Community of West African States; Central African Economic and Monetary Community and African Countries having Portuguese as an official language

**Contact: Pôle de Dakar**  
**E-mail: poledakar@poledakar.org**



## Mother languages neglected in education

Experts are increasingly certain that children obtain better results in school when they are taught in both their mother language and the official national language. An ongoing survey by UNESCO, however, indicates that while use of mother languages for instruction is gaining ground, few countries have incorporated the idea into their education systems.

“Mother tongue languages should be favoured in education systems from the earliest age,” recommended UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura in his message for Mother Language Day on 21 February.

In India about 80 languages are used at different stages of education. In contrast, across Africa, where an estimated 2,011 languages are spoken, the languages of the former colonial powers – English, French, Spanish and Portuguese – still dominate. A similar situation prevails in Latin America, while in Europe instruction is limited mainly to the languages of the European Union.

Safeguarding languages is an urgent need in some 200 countries. According to the *Atlas of the World Languages in Danger of Disappearing* (UNESCO, 2001), 95 per cent of these languages are spoken by only 4 per cent of the population, and an average of two languages die out each month.

Contact: Linda King, UNESCO Paris  
E-mail: l.king@unesco.org

### APRIL

6-7

**UN Literacy Decade Consultative Meeting** • Organized by UNESCO Paris Paris, France • Contact: Maria Malevri, UNESCO Paris  
E-mail: m.malevri@unesco.org  
For more information: [www.unesco.org/education/litdecade](http://www.unesco.org/education/litdecade)

19-23

**Experts' Workshop on Educational Policy Analysis and Evaluation**  
Organized by UNESCO Paris • Paris, France  
Contact: Kacem Bensalah, UNESCO Paris  
E-mail: k.bensalah@unesco.org

20-22

**XIV International Latin American Laboratory for the Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE) Coordinators' Meeting** • Organized by UNESCO Santiago, LLECE and the Minister of Education of Argentina Buenos Aires, Argentina • Contact: Maite González, UNESCO Santiago  
E-mail: mgonzalez@unesco.cl

26-27

**First Meeting of Ministers of Education from Latin America and the Caribbean on the theme Youth and Adult Literacy** • Organized by UNESCO Santiago and the Ministry of Education of Venezuela Caracas, Venezuela • Contact: Maria Luisa Jáuregui, UNESCO Santiago  
E-mail: mjauregui@unesco.cl

27-29

**Central Asian Education Forum**  
Organized by UNESCO Almaty and UNICEF CARK Area Office, UNESCO Tashkent and several Ministries of Education • Tashkent, Uzbekistan  
Contact: Aigul Khalafova, UNESCO Almaty  
E-mail: a.khalafova@unesco.org

28-29

**Ibero-American Congress on Violence in School**  
Organized by UNESCO and Brasília Catholic University • Brasília, Brazil  
Contact: Mara Serli do Couto Fernandes, UNESCO Brasília  
E-mail: mara.fernandes@unesco.org.br

### MAY

10-14

**2nd Intergovernmental Meeting on the draft International Convention Against Doping in Sport** • Organized by UNESCO Paris Paris, France • Contact: Kevin Thompson, UNESCO Paris  
E-mail: k.thompson@unesco.org

27-29

**Education Congress on the theme Adapting to Changing Times and Needs** • Organized by UNESCO and the South-East Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) • Bangkok, Thailand  
Contact: [www.seameo-unesco.org](http://www.seameo-unesco.org)

### JUNE

14

**Pre-Congress on Inclusive Education to the International Congress Towards Full Citizenship (15-17 June)** • Organized by UNESCO and Stavanger University College, Norway • Stavanger, Norway  
Contact: Kenneth Eklindh, UNESCO Paris  
E-mail: k.eklinde@unesco.org

14-16

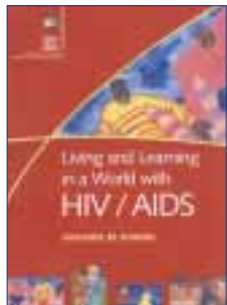
**Adult Education and Poverty Reduction: A Global Priority**  
Organized by UNESCO/UIE, the World Bank, the International Council on Adult Education (ICAE) and the Institute for International Cooperation, Germany • Gaborone, Botswana • Contact: Madhu Singh, UIE  
E-mail: m.singh@unesco.org

### JULY

20-21

**Fifth Meeting of the Working Group on Education for All** • Organized by UNESCO Paris • Paris, France • Contact: Khawla Shaheen, UNESCO Paris  
E-mail: k.shaheen@unesco.org

● **Multigrade Schools: Improving Access in Rural Africa?** by Etienne Brunswic and Jean Valérien. This booklet examines the potential contributions of the multigrade classroom to EFA goals in developing countries. Given the right conditions (the authors consider elements that determine success or failure), it can be a key to quality education at reasonable cost, particularly in rural areas. Available from: [information@iiep.unesco.org](mailto:information@iiep.unesco.org)



● **Living and Learning in a World with HIV/AIDS.** This folder contains educational material to promote a supportive school environment for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. Three brochures, using colourful artwork by students, are directed at young people, teachers and parents, to raise awareness and fight discrimination.

● **Social Inequality at School and Educational Policies** by Marie Duru-Bellat. Education is crucial to creating more democratic societies, yet social inequality in schools is an issue in all developed countries, according to this IIEP booklet. The author analyses the nature and origins of inequalities present in education systems, then reviews policies that can help eliminate them. Available from: [information@iiep.unesco.org](mailto:information@iiep.unesco.org)

● **Open File on Inclusive Education. Support Material for Managers and Administrators.** With contributors from around the world, the file is intended as a resource for all those concerned with promoting inclusive education in their countries, offering them a means to draw on international experience.

● **Education in and for the Information Society**, by Cynthia Guttman. This booklet is one of the documents prepared by UNESCO for the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society. It responds to the main challenges of building “knowledge societies”; the more holistic concept promoted by UNESCO. These challenges are narrowing the digital divide, guaranteeing equitable access to information and building consensus on norms and principles.

● **Empowering Adolescent Girls: Breaking the Poverty Cycle of Women – A UNESCO Pilot Project.** This project, launched in 2002, focuses on girls aged 12 to 18 living in poor rural areas of South Asia – specifically, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan – and provides a variety of activities and services designed to help them “become the agents of social transformation” and work their way out of poverty. The volume provides both an overview of the project so far and profiles of some of the young participants.

● **Planning Education in and after Emergencies.** This booklet considers how and why education should be adapted in emergency situations. Education helps bring back normality and prevent future conflict, says author Margaret Sinclair, as she examines the needs of stricken communities, using examples and testimonies from recent events. Available from: [information@iiep.unesco.org](mailto:information@iiep.unesco.org)

● **Education for All in Latin America: A Goal Within Our Reach. Regional EFA Monitoring Report 2003.** Published by UNESCO’s Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, this report evaluates progress towards the six Education for All goals in Latin America. It also offers an overview of social participation in the development and implementation of national plans. Available from: [unesco@unesco.org](mailto:unesco@unesco.org)



● **The Use of Distance Education and Information and Communication Technologies in Teacher Education: Trends, Policy and Strategy Considerations.** This book contains the proceedings of the UNESCO International Subregional Seminar held in Kiev, Ukraine, in November 2002. The seminar was aimed at decision-makers, planners and teachers involved in the application of ICTs and distance education in teacher training in Central and Eastern European countries.

● **Prospects, Volume XXXIII, No. 4, December 2003 “The Euro-Arab Dialogue: An Educational Bridge?”** The “Open File” in this issue of UNESCO’s Quarterly Review of Comparative Education includes articles on the history of Arabic studies in Hungary; the Arab tradition of medical education in relation to the European tradition; Islam in German textbooks; and technical education in an Arab-European dialogue. Price: 7,32 €. Available from UNESCO Publishing: [www.upo.unesco.org](http://www.upo.unesco.org)

● **Education and Sub-Regional Approaches in Africa.** This status report looks into basic education systems and policies in West and Central Africa and Portuguese-speaking African countries. Published by the *Pôle de Dakar*, a French cooperation initiative and UNESCO Dakar, it provides information and data on the proportion of children who reach the end of primary education in each country. Available from: [poledakar@poledakar.org](mailto:poledakar@poledakar.org)



● **Sharing a World of Difference – The Earth’s Linguistic, Cultural and Biological Diversity.** The links between language, culture and the environment suggest that when it comes to studying and preserving diversity, all three should be considered together. The term “biocultural diversity” refers to this complex new field, to which this booklet is a simple and colourful introduction. Published by UNESCO with the World Wildlife Fund and Terralingua. Price: 9,40 €. Available from UNESCO Publishing: [www.upo.unesco.org](http://www.upo.unesco.org)

*Unless otherwise stated, all publications are available free of charge from UNESCO’s Documentation and Information Service, Education Sector. E-mail: [sdi@unesco.org](mailto:sdi@unesco.org)*

*Education Today* is a quarterly newsletter on trends and innovations in education, on worldwide efforts towards Education for All and on UNESCO’s own education activities. It is published by UNESCO’s Education Sector in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Russian. All articles are free of copyright restrictions and can be reproduced provided *Education Today* is credited.

Editors: Anne Müller and Teresa Murtagh

Contributors: Cathy Nolan, pp. 3, 8-11; Beatrix Dekoster, pp. 4-7

Assistant: Martine Kayser • Design: Pilote Corporate • Layout: Sylvaine Baeyens

Photo credits (cover): Berthold Egner; UNESCO/ASPnet/Karin Hunziker; UNESCO/Brendan O’Malley;

UNESCO/Georges Malempré; UNESCO/Spier-Donati

