

**SECOND MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON
EDUCATION FOR ALL
10 – 12 SEPTEMBER, 2001**

**EFA – A CAUSE FOR URGENCY IN AFRICA
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Africa has had the most difficult time to meet the goals of Education for All as adopted by the Jountien World Conference on Education. It has faced further, hurdles to maintain or sustain the few achievements made in the field of education. Constraints to making bigger leaps in the delivery of education services are well documented, and in the last few years, HIV/AIDS dampened further what hopes could have been raised.

As Dakar, in April 2000, gave opportunities for renewed vigour and recommitment to meet the EFA goals, most African countries started the race to either revisit and revive old plans or to work towards developing fresh national action plans. Some have gone full throttle, while others are taking time to take off. For some countries like in West Africa, this gave an opportunity for close collaboration while other have decided to work individually at their own pace.

Formulation of National Action Plans

Among the fundamental conditions contained by the Dakar Framework for Action for the formulation of National Action Plans is the requirement to systematically consult with civil society. Seeking the opinion and advice of NGOs and Civil Society organisations is important but participation in the entire process would be more preferable. To borrow some of the attributes of "Participation" as given by a DFID Report cited in the Malawi Economic Justice Network Newsletter of March 2001, which applies well to our context, we can only acknowledge full and meaningful NGO/Civil Society participation if:

- CSOs are involved in the formulation process – that is – beyond Attending meetings
- Time is given for civil society to meet together and to Democratically elect its representatives
- the elected CSOs consult with their constituencies and other groups in their sector during drafting of plans
- all relevant document is made available before hand
- timetables for meetings are drawn up jointly
- contributions/opinions of wider civil society are sought on draft document of the plans.

This participatory process would allow all stakeholders to understand the issue at hand better and create a sense of ownership to decisions and plans made.

Why else is this process important? According to the December 2000 Bamako Seminar Report on NGO/CSO contributions to the Education for All Goals in sub Saharan Africa, there have been achievements made by them in

- formal primary education
- literacy and adult education – particular for women
- education/training for school drop-outs, covering both girls and boys
- general non formal basic education
- social mobilisation and community participation
- alternative approaches to education with examples from Ghana, Namibia, Mali, Senegal, South Africa, Burkina Faso, Niger and Guinea

- development and implementation of programmes related to reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, peace education, democracy, human rights and environmental issues.

The Dakar Framework for Action is about working towards an expanded vision of education for all. Obviously, NGOs/CSOs have valuable experiences and lessons which are important for consideration in drawing up national action plans. I can happily say that Zambia has reached a stage in which Government has invited full representation from NGOs to participate in strategic planning – an Education Policy backup. The state of affairs, however, is that there are a number of countries where NGOs/CSOs are still struggling for recognition and inclusion in the process of policy and action plans formulation. A few have sought intermediaries to make things work in their favour – a situation which is regrettable. The Bamako seminar underlined the fact that “in many cases, the achievements outlined above have not been sufficiently taken into account in the development of national education policies.” The seminar noted further that “most countries do not build on these innovative and relevant experiences, which may indicate a lack of political dialogue, a lack of expertise or insufficient awareness.”

Assessment and Funding National EFA Plans

Stemming from the Dakar Framework for Action, the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries held in Brussels, 14 – 20 May, 2001, recognised in its paper entitled “Deliverables” that although costing the elaboration or improvement of National EFA Plans and their later implementation will be a case per case exercise – in close cooperation between governments and partners, consideration should be made regarding the various situations, backgrounds and condition of each given country.

It is hoped that determination of whether a country's action plan passes or not will not

take unnecessary haggling thereby causing further delays. In any case, the same paper points out that Least Developed Countries' policy-makers need to adopt approaches which are intersectorally coherent and relevant to national development strategies, and that they must reconcile with national priorities and local cultural identities.

National, Sub Regional & Regional Cooperation

A recent positive development in most African countries is that formation of coalitions/alliances/networks by NGOs and CSOs working in the field of education. These national coalitions are then becoming members of sub regional and regional networks such as the African Network Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA). This is seen as a major strategy to engage Governments much more effectively; raise common issues relevant to Africa and to share important lessons, innovations and experiences.