

Special Session

on

the Involvement of Civil Society in Education for All

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Synthesis Report

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Table of contents

Introduction	3
Rationale of this report	3
Summary of Panel Presentations	3
Section I. Who is civil society?	5
Section II. Why is civil society involvement in education important?	6
Governments cannot do it alone.....	6
Lack of human and financial resources	6
Democratic principles and processes.....	6
Need for relevance and new vision	7
It is worth it	7
Section III. What kind of civil society involvement?	7
Alternative service providers	7
Reaching out to disadvantaged groups.....	7
Providing volunteer teaching.....	8
Creating literate societies	8
Critical voices	8
Innovator	9
The Shepherd School or the REFLECT approach.....	9
Defining new content and approaches.....	9
Informed critic and advocate	10
Policy partner	111
Critical voices	111
Agents in community-based governance.....	122
The changing role of communities: from resource mobilization to governance	122
A microcosm of national education governance	122
Critical voices	133
Section IV. Preconditions to successful inclusion of civil society in the formulation, planning and action for EFA	133
1 Commitment to the Dakar goals.....	133
2 Clear policy to collaborate with civil society	133
3 Open, democratic, stable and decentralized political systems	144
4 Mutual trust and transparency	155
5 Capacity building.....	155
6 Creating partnership mechanisms.....	155
7 Need for international collaboration and solidarity	177
Section V. Concluding remarks	188
Political will and co-ordination.....	188
Practical steps	199
Annex 1	20

Introduction

The special session on the involvement of civil society in Education for All (EFA) was both a symbolic and a substantive event. Convened by the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr Koichiro Matsuura, eighty Ministers and ten Vice-ministers of Education and four hundred governmental and non-governmental representatives met on one single platform to discuss concrete examples of how their collaboration is conducted in practice. Education Ministers from Ghana and Mozambique, the Secretary of Education from Nepal and the Deputy Minister of Education from Yemen were joined by a civil society organization from three of these countries to present experiences of government–NGO partnership for EFA, and subsequently identify practical steps aimed at enhancing civil society’s contribution to EFA and promoting better government-civil society relations. The Secretary-General of Education International presented an analytical response, which was followed by a lively debate.

The theme for the Special Session, ‘Involvement of Civil Society in Education for All’, reflects the overriding importance attached to the role of non-governmental and other civil society organizations in EFA processes and movement. EFA will not be successful unless all partners and actors are mobilized and empowered to play their role in a movement, which rests on a solid, democratic foundation.

In Dakar, governments agreed that they have ‘an obligation to ensure that EFA goals and targets are reached and sustained’ (para. 2 of the Dakar Framework for Action), and that this responsibility ‘will be met most effectively through broad-based partnerships within countries’ (para. 2). The participants in the World Education Forum pledged themselves to ‘ensure the engagement and participation of civil society in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of strategies for educational development’ (para. 8).

The Special Session focused on the involvement of civil society in policy formation processes understood more broadly than the development of specific EFA plans. It addressed the key question of how countries can move from a clear recognition of civil society’s policy role to genuine participation and partnership at the country level. The invited governmental and non-governmental representatives discussed examples, possibilities and preconditions with regard to successful inclusion of civil society in policy formulation, planning and action related to achieving the Dakar goals.

Rationale of this report

This report will highlight some of the key questions, issues and themes that emerged from the debate on civil society involvement in EFA. It can serve as a reference tool for governments, civil society organizations and other partners who are ready to undertake practical steps to enhance civil society contributions to EFA and promote better government-civil society relations, thus connecting international political will for civil society participation in EFA with national and local realities.

Summary of Panel Presentations

In the opening speech, the Director-General of UNESCO discussed the different roles and responsibilities of governments and civil society organizations in promoting Education for All (see Annex I, p. 22). He particularly emphasized the new role of civil society organizations as policy partners in education, and hence the need to explore how viable mechanisms for consultation on issues related to EFA can be established or strengthened. While acknowledging the diversity of

specific country contexts, the Director-General highlighted how UNESCO will continue to actively promote the process of partnership building and global EFA co-ordination.

The Minister of Education from Ghana gave a short account of the recent achievements in terms of the Education for All Goals referring to the efforts of (a) mainstreaming early childhood education provision, which is mainly private, into the public system, (b) increasing free compulsory universal basic education to 83% with a positive impact on gender disparities through a special programme that began in 1996 (c) reducing illiteracy rates to about 48%, and (d) improving quality. The Minister then mentioned the importance of civil society in this process and explained how Ghana had moved from recognizing the role of civil society in complementary and innovative service provision and community mobilization to involving its different constituencies as policy partners. He gave examples of viable partnership mechanisms at local and national levels.

The civil society representative from Action Aid, Ghana, gave examples of viable partnership with the government which led to the recognition and mainstreaming of some of the innovative practices of alternative service provision. The representative also referred to new partnership experiences among civil society organizations through the Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition (see Section III, Box 1, p. 12).

The Minister of Education from Mozambique referred to the creation of institutionalized mechanisms for civil society consultation at national level to inform the process of policy formulation. He also mentioned the responsibility recently assigned to a new Department on Community Participation in the Ministry of Education to propose partnership and participatory mechanisms at local levels.

The Secretary of Education from Nepal reported some achievements with regard to the EFA Goals, since the literacy rate is now 58% and the primary school enrolment rate 72%. Gender disparities and issues of quality remain major challenges. The representative emphasized his government's recognition with regard to the contribution of civil society in establishing primary schooling and other education services since the 1950s. The creation of a favourable policy and an operational environment has helped to facilitate the complementary service provision of over 30,000 civil society organizations (CSOs) in the country. The representative mentioned that the time might have come to involve civil society in policy formulation, referring to the newly created EFA Forum and the process of elaborating a National EFA Action Plan.

The civil society representative from Asia Pacific Partnership in Nepal emphasized the positive correlation between periods of democratization and the scope of civil society involvement in education. He expressed regret that this democratization process has not been continuous and urged the government to involve civil society systematically not only as a service provider, but also as a policy partner.

The Deputy Minister of Education from Yemen highlighted the importance of private schools in education as complementary service providers in competition with public schools. The Minister mentioned some experiences with parent advisory committees and underlined the importance of electing local civil society teams to allow for their participation in planning and implementing the national education strategy, which was developed after Dakar.

The civil society representative of the Teachers' Union in Yemen underlined the recent growth of what he called an 'independent diversified education sector'. The 1990 democratization process led to the encouragement of private initiatives in education. The representative drew attention to the need for legal frameworks to organize the functioning of the private initiatives and called for representation of civil society in national decision-making bodies in charge of formulating education policies.

The civil society representative Secretary-General of Education International presented an analytical response to the presentations relating the statements to key issues such as financing education and ensuring quality and equity. He referred to the unprecedented work undertaken by the Global Campaign for Education in raising awareness for the need to mobilize public funds to close the financing gap of US\$7 billion, which is needed, according to the Campaign, to ensure EFA worldwide by 2015. The representative discussed the dangers of unbridled privatization vis-à-vis free education and the adverse impact on quality of engaging volunteer teachers on a large scale. The Secretary-General particularly underlined the importance of government responsibility in coordinating all EFA efforts at country level and improving the status and working conditions for teachers in order to establish free and compulsory primary education for all children.

Section I

Who is civil society?

The discussions confirmed the concern raised by the Director-General of UNESCO in his Opening Speech that there is need for further clarification of the terms 'civil society'. Most interventions reflected an understanding of civil society as all organizations, groupings and associations that are non-profit and non-governmental. However, the deliberations showed that the term is sometimes also applied to governmental and private sector organizations. Reference was made to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and campaign networks, teachers' unions and religious organizations, community associations and research networks, parent-teacher associations and professional bodies, student organizations and community-based school management committees, women's groups, parliamentarians, private sector organizations and others.

Representatives from civil society warned about the danger of blurring the concept and creating confusion. As the Secretary-General of Education International said: 'The private enterprises and businesses and governmental institutions are in my view not to be considered civil society organizations. . . . [W]e have government, we have business – the market – and in-between [we] have civil society.'

An African delegate drew attention to the rich pre-colonial tradition with regard to civil society which should not be marginalized, if 'we want to give relevance and meaning to EFA in our specific contexts', as he said. In his view, the wise people, the third generation, or traditional professional associations, are just as much members of civil society. Even if, as he pointed out, they are not as visible as the modern NGOs in the eyes of international partners, they constitute an important part of civil society in Africa. An intervention from Russia linked the notion of civil society to the concept of exemplary citizenship and great persons of knowledge and research, saying: '. . . Tolstoi was particularly active in the field of education in rural areas, and we should follow and be inspired by these examples,' remarked the delegate.

The Director-General of UNESCO re-emphasized the importance of the criteria 'non-governmental and non-profit' in distinguishing civil society organizations from other actors. He also underlined that, in the context of EFA and the efforts to strengthen the EFA movement, it is important to be as inclusive as possible.

Section II

Why is civil society involvement in education important?

Governments cannot do it alone

A broad consensus emerged from all the country presentations and the discussions that achieving the Education for All goals is too complex a challenge for governments to undertake alone; therefore civil society involvement is important and indispensable. However, the reasons that were given varied. Some were based on pragmatic considerations and others on questions of principle. Some reasons were rooted in economic, others in political considerations. Yet others were motivated by the concern for quality and the need to transform education systems.

Lack of human and financial resources

All government representatives saw the lack of human and financial resources in contexts of economic hardship as a major reason to involve civil society in EFA. The Minister of Ghana summarized: 'It is widely accepted that the cost of funding education for all is prohibitive and beyond the resources of most countries in the world, especially developing countries. The mobilization of adequate resources, both human and material, to meet the challenges of implementation make the problem even more complex in the face of mounting economic problems. It is for this reason that governments need to work in partnership with civil society in financing and promoting education for all as a lifelong enterprise.'

Governmental and non-governmental representatives mentioned the correlation between the lack of resources and the contributions to the provision of education. However, some CSOs warned that the involvement of civil society organizations should not be driven by the financial needs of governments, but rather by their aspiration to promote democratic development.

Democratic principles and processes

Many interventions emphasized that the nature of democratic systems calls for broad-based participation in all aspects of education policy since, as Canada put it, 'a basic premise of democracy is that decisions shaped by the experience and knowledge of a plurality of citizens are more legitimate and more representative than decisions that are made by only a few'. Attention was drawn to the 113 million school-age children who are out-of-school, high rates of repetition and drop-out, and the 875 million adults who are illiterate, which highlight the limitations of public authorities and bureaucracies and their inability to satisfy the demand for free education. One representative raised the problem of frequent changes in education ministries, which often lead to discontinuity in the processes of education governance. According to him, civil society organizations are less exposed to changes and therefore have an important role to play in ensuring continuity of the EFA process.

While many deliberations strongly supported the argument for civil society involvement as a democratic principle, several speakers reminded the meeting that broad participation in decision-making today is in fact still limited. Some governments do not yet seem to show commitment to this issue which, as one NGO said, may be due partly to traditional thinking of government people that they know what is best for the people and they best know how to do it. This view, according to him, is no doubt changing: but it is none the less changing slowly.

Need for relevance and new vision

Many challenges in attaining the EFA goals were raised in the discussions, including issues of quality, relevance and vision. A broad consensus emerged that developments in education content and processes have to take into account general developments in society. Furthermore, the need to find new modalities in the field of education in the context of current globalization was underlined. 'The paradigm we are using is very old,' said a civil society representative from the Arab Region. 'There is a need to revisit the paradigm and many of the NGO success stories could be used as places to start with.' Many participants reinforced the need for a pluralistic perspective on education and recognized the strength of civil society in this regard. The Minister of Education from Mozambique mentioned that 'civil society participation in education allows us to expand our vision of these [education] problems, as was said at the meeting in Jomtien.'

It is worth it . . .

The strong contribution of civil society to EFA, particularly as service provider, is a reality and a major reason for governments to reinforce their involvement. In this context the representative from the Nordic countries from Denmark said: '. . . we have benefited enormously from involving pupils, students, teachers, parents, the disabled and their respective organizations. The same is true of trade unions and employers' associations, and we have a long-standing tradition of NGOs having a strong influence on educational issues at all levels. The pattern of co-operation in countries varies, but experience tells us that close co-operation between education and civil society is an important means and will be an important means to fulfil the goals from Dakar.'

Section III

What kind of civil society involvement?

One of the non-governmental organizations rightly said: '. . . you recognize that no government can achieve this goal [Education for All] by itself. You need the involvement of our societies.' And the questions are: 'What kind of involvement?' and 'What kind of action?'

The Director-General identified four roles of civil society in his opening speech: these roles are service providers, innovators, critics and advocates and, finally, policy partners. These roles were highlighted in different ways in the discussion, particularly with regard to community-based education governance.

Alternative service providers

All presentations and many interventions from the floor emphasized the key role of civil society in service provision where state-provided services are absent or insufficient. The presentations confirmed that CSOs have the advantage of being more flexible than the state, closer to the grass roots and local cultures and, in many cases, more innovative in approach. 'CSOs have emerged as leaders and major actors in the provision of non-formal and alternative education, with experience in linking education to other development sectors and building partnerships at different levels.' The experiences show that the distinction between formal and non-formal education becomes less prominent when CSOs get involved in basic education.

Reaching out to disadvantaged groups

Participants confirmed that civil society organizations particularly cater to the needs of disadvantaged groups, including girls and women, children in slums or isolated rural areas or

extreme poverty, street children, nomads, the disabled, populations affected by conflict and displacement. They help these learners to improve their livelihoods and living conditions.

- Several countries, including India and Pakistan, explained that in their countries, CSOs have shouldered major responsibilities for non-formal education programmes entrusted to them by governments and funding agencies. Early childhood education was also mentioned as an area where civil society is particularly active along with the private sector.
- Action Aid Ghana made specific reference to their street children project, the so-called feeder schools, peer education initiatives, education for the prevention of AIDS and the promotion of peace and community education.
- The representative from the Teacher's Union from Yemen indicated that partnership with private initiatives led to a diversified independent sector in education which offers access to thousands of students who cannot be reached by the government public school system.
- The South Asia Partnership, Nepal, gave an impressive account of how civil society participation led to increased access for underprivileged children in the 1950, when the country started to transform into a modern democratic society: 'The civil society was the vanguard of Nepalese efforts in the establishment of a public education system. . . . The civil society initiated the task of establishing schools for children all over the country. This resulted in a phenomenal growth in the number of schools and child enrolment. By 1971 – that's within a 20-year period – the number of primary schools had reached nearly 10,000 from a mere 351 in 1951. The number of students also increased by about 2,000-fold.'

Providing volunteer teaching

Action Aid Ghana presented a rural education volunteer scheme addressed to young people, especially girls, who lack the required grades or support for further education. The initiative works with rural communities, local government structures and the Ghana Education Service to recruit young people as volunteer teachers in their own communities. In return, these young people receive tuition to continue their own schooling after serving as volunteers. The programme seeks to establish a long-term project and provide input to national education policy and practice concerning quality provision of education in remote and deprived areas.

Creating literate societies

It is striking to note that all presentations from the panel and most of the contributions from the floor, whether from India or Cuba, Peru or Benin, Cote d'Ivoire or Pakistan, made reference to the key role of civil society in the field of literacy. Action Aid's concrete experience with the so-called REFLECT approach in Ghana highlights an expanded vision of literacy as an integral part of community learning, empowerment and development. REFLECT 'is a community-based technique which uses participatory methods in sensitizing communities to their developmental needs and involve them in raising issues and addressing them at the same time acquiring literacy and numeracy' (Action Aid Ghana).

Critical voices

Alternative services: transitory or permanent? The representative of Education International raised concern about the duration of civil society interventions in expanding access to schooling for children. In his view, the involvement of groups such as NGOs, churches, aid agencies and other non-profit institutions should be temporary: 'Eventually their work has to be handed over to the public authorities, and if we meet our target, that means no later than 2015, and then it would be the governments that would do the work currently being paid for and implemented by these groups.'

Alternative services and quality. The Africa Network Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA) raised the issue of quality in alternative service provision and expressed surprise not to have heard governments mention their experiences in the field of capacity building of CSOs to support their effective and constructive involvement in education. This was considered crucial for ensuring quality and relevant education services.

The Secretary-General of Education International expressed serious concern about the quality of education and underlined that quality education requires quality teachers: ‘ . . . We frankly do not think that the recruitment of unskilled volunteers is the way forward. While that may make the statistics for school enrolment look much better, the quality of education obviously suffers. Making believe that this is the way towards education for all is truly not serious.’ He appealed to the meeting to understand that EFA is not just about bringing more children into schools, but about making them learn. Adequate investment in teacher training is necessary. Ghana was presented as an example of a country that abandoned the idea of volunteer teaching and instead invested more in teacher training.

The World Confederation of Teachers made a case for closer collaboration and co-ordination between teachers of formal and non-formal education services, emphasizing that without strong teaching expertise it will not be possible to provide quality education to all children.

A critical remark was addressed to the Yemen experience where private formal schools are being encouraged so that they will be in competition with the public schools and thereby improve education quality. The Secretary-General of Education International pointed out: ‘Nobody will be able to give an example of any country in the world where the establishment of private schools has improved the quality of a public school system. . . . What you are doing is actually endangering accessibility of children to schools.’

Innovator

‘Education for all means the participation of all for a different kind of education,’ said the Peruvian representative. Many participants, who underlined the important role of civil society in improving content and methodologies, supported this plea for innovation. Reference was also made to the report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, *Learning The Treasure Within* (Paris, UNESCO Publishing, 1996), which underlines the importance of local community involvement in education reform. Civil society has proved its role as innovators, as sources of new thinking and new practices and helped to move the EFA vision forward by responding to changing learning needs through diverse initiatives and critical analysis of existing concepts and practices.

The Shepherd School or the REFLECT approach

The Shepherd School, for example, facilitated by Action Aid Ghana, or the above mentioned REFLECT approach, are viable examples of filling the ‘ideas gap’ in EFA, thus succeeding in empowering the poor to define their own learning priorities and schedules. Shepherd schools are flexible school systems that use participatory approaches based on negotiations with communities, flexible meetings with the teachers, community facilitators and mother tongue in classroom instruction.

Defining new content and approaches

There were many interventions on how civil society prepared innovative curricula in areas such as civic education, health education, science education, environmental issues or sex and AIDS education. They included new approaches and contents in order to promote peace and intercultural dialogue. Caritas International, for instance, referred to their work in developing innovative programmes and learning approaches for peace and tolerance.

Informed critic and advocate

'Everyone in this room knows that the call [for EFA] was not achieved. Dakar recommitted us all with a new calendar and a new deadline and there is, I believe, a very important new factor this time: namely an unprecedented global campaign to mobilize public opinion,' said the General-Secretary of Education International.

The Global Campaign for Education advocates on the assumption that funds for education can be raised from public sources, if there is political will. That is why, according to the General-Secretary of Education International, 'the mobilization of public opinion is so important. . . . That is, in my view, an important meaning of involving society in action.' He made special reference to the role of civil society in OECD countries in exerting political pressure for development assistance to promote EFA. Indeed the past decade has seen new forms of civil society organization and expression geared towards advocating for the right to education. The Global Campaign for Education along with other partners contributed to shaping the international EFA agenda. National civil society networks and coalitions have emerged which are trying to fill democracy and quality gaps in education by bringing the voices of the poor into national policy discussion.

Action Aid for example supports the Ghana national education campaign coalition by equipping the secretariat and paying staff (see Box 1).

Box 1. The Ghana national education campaign coalition: a new form of civil society organization and expression

The coalition is made up of NGOs and civil society groups which have concern for falling standards of education, particularly for the disadvantaged groups such as rural and urban dwellers, disabled children, the poor and girls. The main objective is to campaign for quality and enjoyable basic education for Ghanaian children irrespective of gender, ethnicity and geographical location. The national education campaign acts as a pressure group on the government urging the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service to keep their promise for education reform, free compulsory universal basic education and education for all. The Campaign is involved in national mechanisms for policy dialogue and also carries out research, documentation and advocacy.

Extracted from the presentation by Action Aid Alliance, Ghana.

Education International reported on an advocacy experience in Nepal that was opposing the recent tendencies by the Nepalese government to completely 'commercialize' education in trying to introduce school fees even in the public school system. 'The action of civil society was successful to the extent that I believe it was a student union that succeeded in reaching an agreement with the association of owners of private schools about the level of fees.'

Policy partner

There were some strong examples of the acknowledgement of civil society as a policy partner, particularly from Ghana, India, Mozambique and Pakistan. It was clear, however, that this is a new area with scope for further development.

In the case of Ghana, policy dialogue with civil society has already been institutionalized at local and national levels. Mechanisms and frameworks exist which ensure that the dialogue is systematic and ongoing, instead of ad hoc and occasional. The Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), the School Performance Appraisal Committees (SPAMS), the School Management Committees (SMC) are local level mechanisms which have had some positive impact with regard to increased access to schooling, resource mobilization, adaptation of education content and organization as well as improved performance. At the national level, there are mechanisms such as monthly meetings with civil society, development partners and the ministry of education to discuss the availability and use of external funding. There are thematic working groups, which focus on developing recommendations to inform the formulation of policies and strategies with regard to specific issues (see Table 1).

Mainstreaming of the Shepherd Schools or scaling-up of the REFLECT approach in Ghana are two examples of constructive policy dialogue between governments and civil society. The national civil society coalition for education is actively involved in all the existing mechanisms and facilitates exchange between government and a larger group of civil society organizations.

Critical voices

Need for systematic dialogue. Several civil society interventions underlined the urgent need to meet the Dakar commitment concerning this new role, thus pointing out challenges related to the absence of mechanisms and the problem of tokenism:

“With a long history and widespread involvement in action, Nepal’s civil society has now gained the experience and capacity to contribute in policy formulation and planning. Although this happens to a certain extent in the form of some civil society representatives being invited to participate in occasional policy discussions and planning exercises, these have been largely on an ad hoc basis and often smacks of tokenism. Nepal still lacks a systematic mechanism for involving the civil society in policy formulation and planning” (South Asia Partnership, Nepal).

The Teacher’s Union representative from Yemen noted the absence or the lack of civil society representation on national decision-making bodies in charge of formulating educational policies. Several interventions underlined the importance to also include students and learners in this dialogue so that they learn the practice of democracy and enrich the policy choices concerning EFA.

Competencies in policy formulation. Other civil society organizations drew attention to the fact that civil society capacity has to be reinforced if EFA policy formulation is to be based on a broad societal movement and integrate lessons from viable civil society practice: ‘We are conscious that there are a lot of NGOs who have been in the forefront of innovative and creative work at the grass-roots level, but have yet to build up their capacities in order to more effectively engage at the policy level,’ explained the representative from the Asia Pacific Bureau for Adult Education (ASPBAE).

Agents in community-based governance

The communities emerged as the most frequently cited civil society constituency in the promotion of EFA during the presentations of the Special Session. Their role in all issues related to education provision and processes was extensively underlined.

The changing role of communities: from resource mobilization to governance

The story of community participation in Ghana shows two interesting developments with regard to the changing role and organization of community involvement:

- an expansion from playing the role of resource mobilization and local education management to participation in defining education and assessing quality and processes;
- the development from loosely structured to institutionalized and systematic involvement in local education governance through Teacher-Parent Associations (PTAs), School Management Committees (SMCs) and School Performance Appraisal Meetings (SPAM);

However, these developments are taking place slowly. Resource mobilization and, to some extent, moral community support emerged as the predominant strengths of community involvement in the different deliberations: 'Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) acted as rallying points for the various communities and society at large to mobilize funds and moral and material support for schools. There are a number of schools who benefited from this largesse of the PTAs. Where PTAs could not provide the much-needed funds for school projects, they readily provided communal labour,' said the Minister of Education from Ghana.

The remarks made by the Secretary-General of Education from Nepal followed in the same direction: 'Central to the strength of civil society, as we all agree, is its ability to access additional financial, technical, community-based and political resources. Mobilization of any additional resources and support to the education sector is indeed highly welcome and commendable. . . .'

The Minister of Education from Yemen continued along the same lines: ' . . . and there are more than 3 million pupils who go to 12,000 schools in Yemen. Civil society has to participate in setting up parent committees in all schools. . . . These parent committees establish a link between the society and the school . . . and allow channeling the necessary funds for every school year.'

A microcosm of national education governance

The role of civil society in community-based governance bears relevance for the other four dimensions of civil society involvement mentioned above: alternative service provider, innovator, informed critic and advocate and policy partner. The state-community partnership reflects a microcosm of national education governance and is most developed in decentralized systems.

Community-based committees create spaces for all constituencies of local civil society including traditional and religious authorities or women and young people to participate in local education policy choices. They thereby help to reconcile traditional and modern views on education.

The space for civil society involvement at local levels is often directly proportionate to the extent of democratization and decentralization processes in a country. Many speakers, including the presenting countries, dwelt on the positive role that civil society organizations have played in mobilizing genuine involvement and participation of local communities.

Critical voices

Communities cannot replace public funding The General-Secretary of Education International reacted strongly to the role attributed to communities in resource mobilization: ‘The idea that Education for All can be financed by payments from parents is simply wrong. You may be able to finance education for some but not for all if we go that way. Those denied education are, as we all know, the poor and they cannot pay; and the idea of trying to make poor parents pay, which is an idea invoked in some theoretical circles, must be rejected if you are serious about education for all and not education for some.’

Section IV

Preconditions to successful inclusion of civil society in the formulation, planning and action for EFA

While national contexts differ with regard to social and political systems, traditions and cultures, the Minister of Education from Ghana pointed out that the onus is on the governments to create enabling environments for the operations of development partners. There is no blueprint for civil society involvement, but some factors emerged from the discussion, which seem to be conducive to viable partnership building in different settings. Seven of these preconditions are summarized below.

1 Commitment to the Dakar goals

All the presentations reconfirmed the commitment of their countries to the Dakar goals and some reported on action that they had already undertaken to implement the Dakar Framework for Action. Mozambique, for example, has already elaborated a national plan to promote education for all. Nepal put in place a forum and a core group to co-ordinate and guide the national education efforts and the drafting of the national plan of action. Yemen elaborated a national strategy for education as a follow-up to Dakar.

The reference to the Dakar goals and related international conferences is useful in building partnerships for EFA, since they provide a common framework for discussion.

2 Clear policy to collaborate with civil society

Ghana emerged as one strong example of a country actively involved in addressing the multiple dimensions of the Dakar Framework for Action through involving civil society. The Minister of Education considered the existence of a clear policy to collaborate with civil society as key in the process: ‘It behoves governments to accept creating fora for interacting with civil society, show the commitment to respect the other viewpoint and take cognizance of the viewpoint of ministry inputs or policy formulation.’

A clear policy also implies a recognition of civil society as a policy partner, which may in some cases require changes in the political traditions and thinking that, as one CSO put it, government people ‘know best what is good for the people and they know how best to do it’, said the representative from South Asia Partnership, Nepal. Policies on civil society involvement have to pay attention to reconciling traditional and modern forms of expression to tap on the wisdom of all and promote broad-based ownership.

3 Open, democratic, stable and decentralized political systems

Several interventions, particularly from South Asia as well as the presentation from Yemen, highlighted the correlation between the political system of a country and the possibilities for state-civil society involvement. The more open, democratic and decentralized a political system, the more there is scope for state-civil society partnership. Peace and political stability are other preconditions for viable partnerships. The example of Nepal illustrates this point (see Box 2).

Box 2. Civil society involvement in the changing political context of Nepal

The involvement of the civil society in Nepal in the field of education dates back to 1950, when Nepal took its first steps towards becoming a modern democratic society after more than a century of repressive Rana rule in the country.

The civil society efforts have witnessed spurts of growth every time the society and the government policies became more open and accommodating. Similarly, the de facto centralization of the education system in Nepal in 1971 saw a reversal in the role of civil society. The centralization of 1971 led to significant reduction in the involvement of civil society in educational activities.

Another part of civil society's partnership in Nepalese education efforts was observed after 1990, when Nepal ushered into the era of a more open and democratic society with the adoption of a multi-party parliamentary system. This new development in the polity of the country and the liberal and supportive policies of the government in post-1990 period provided space, opportunity and challenge to the civil society to further expand its role in the educational efforts of Nepal.

The Nepalese civil society sees the increasing insurgency problem in Nepal as a threat to its role in education for all efforts. The insurgency problems have severely curtailed the educational activities of several civil society organizations. The insurgents have a very monolithic view and see no role for others in education except the state or the central authorities. This we believe is a very retrogressive view, which will be most unfortunate for partnership of all actors for education for all. We hope the greater wisdom will prevail in all. (*Source*: Presentation by the South Asia Partnership, Nepal)

4 Mutual trust and transparency

Several interventions from countries, including Canada, Nepal and Mozambique, underlined the importance of trust and transparency in promoting civil society involvement in EFA.

I believe that the first and foremost condition for a meaningful and effective role for the civil society in moving towards the goals and objectives of education for all would be to build a greater trust between these bodies and the government. Our relatively short history of collaborative efforts tends at times to make one party apprehensive or critical of the other. The fact to appreciate is that each has its own domain, role and function to play (Secretary of Education, Nepal).

The Minister of Education from Mozambique explained how the dialogue regarding the political sector is 'a tool to promote transparency and acceptance among the different stakeholders. . .'. Government representatives also mentioned the need for civil society partners to be genuine and transparent in their organizational procedures and practice as well as having a credible track record of success. The civil society organizations, in particular the African Network Campaign on Education for All, urged the governments to improve their information-sharing mechanisms in order for their partners to prepare constructive input to policy dialogue. If information is not available, it is difficult for civil society to be constructive.

5 Capacity building

Civil society organizations drew attention to the fact that civil society capacity has to be reinforced if EFA policy formulation is to be based on a broad civil society movement. The discussions pointed out that this should be a collective responsibility of governments, civil society and other partners. Reference was made to the need for study tours and exchange of experiences. The African Network Campaign on Education for All stressed the joint initiative of UNESCO and the World Bank in collaboration with the Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education for All to build capacity of civil society in education in Africa as an example to be pursued. This initiative identified capacity building needs in four areas: (a) education content, (b) pedagogy, (c) programming and management, as well as (d) policy dialogue and information exchange.

6 Creating partnership mechanisms

Several interventions underlined the need to move from ad hoc to systematic and institutionalized mechanisms for civil society involvement in order to bring the voices from the grass roots into the policy dialogue, build knowledge on the country experience and best practices, inspire other initiatives and promote the scaling up or mainstreaming of certain activities.

'The first aspect is the efforts to improve systems of education. In order to address EFA-related challenges in an adequate way, solid structures for dialogue between different stakeholders in education must be established. . . . To create high-quality education, it is important to fully utilize all available resources through the involvement and participation of the stakeholders in decision-making at different levels. . .' (Denmark for the Nordic countries).

The Peruvian representative underlined the need to put in place stable and permanent mechanisms to collect all proposals and ideas regarding education: '. . . I think institutionalized mechanisms seem necessary to build democracy, but to also improve the quality of EFA.'

Tables 1 and 2 (see following page) summarize some mechanisms which countries have considered as useful in promoting partnership with civil society.

Table 1. Community-based mechanisms for civil society involvement in EFA –examples from Ghana¹

Type of mechanism	Objective/function	Participants	Results /impact	Challenges
Parent-Teacher associations (PTAs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilize funds, and moral and material support for schools. 	Parents and teachers	Evidence of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources mobilized from the community; • Better teacher conditions (meals and housing) 	Discuss learning of the community as a whole: children and other age groups
School monitoring appraisal meetings (SPAM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate information-sharing on teaching and learning going on in the local school; • Facilitate participatory decision-making on how to improve learning outcomes. 	Teachers and the entire community	Evidence of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved examination results; • Increased teacher motivation; • Rejection of teachers which violate school rules 	Discuss learning processes beyond the walls of the school and for all age groups in the community
School Management Committees (SMCs),	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control the general policy of the school; • Ensure effective management by the head teacher. 	Immediate stakeholders of the school in the community	Evidence of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better maintenance of public facilities; • Stronger sense of ownership for the school infrastructure 	Reinforce discussion on education purpose and content beyond the walls of the school and for all members of the community

Table 2. National partnership mechanisms for civil society involvement in EFA – examples from Ghana²

Type of mechanism	Objective/function	Participants	Results/impact	Challenges
Monthly meetings with government and development partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise government on questions related to development assistance in the field of education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Education; Development Partners; Selected non-governmental organizations; national civil society networks/coalitions 	Evidence of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ordinated funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure participation beyond tokenism; • Challenge of Legitimacy of civil society representative.
Thematic group meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise government on specific aspects of Education policy and practice; • Capitalize on knowledge and expertise in the country. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialized staff from the Ministry of Education; specialized civil society organizations; specialized staff from development partners 	Evidence of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in policy with regard to education for marginalized groups • Broader involvement of civil society in policy dialogue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand participation as appropriate.
National Education Forum (Ghana)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create consensus on a shared understanding of education; • Capitalize on knowledge and expertise in the country; • Advise government on new policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Education, Development partners, traditional rulers, university lecturers, members of Parliament and district assemblies, religious bodies, NGOs, students, parents, the media, political parties and others 	Evidence of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy decision rooted in broad-based participation and validated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replicate as appropriate in specific thematic areas • Ensure follow-up

1. Mozambique and Yemen also mentioned the importance of Parent-Teachers Associations and School Management Committees as forms of civil society participation in EFA.

2. Mozambique also reported on thematic working groups and a National Education Forum.

7 Need for international collaboration and solidarity

Several interventions, including Cuba and the Secretary-General of Education International, mentioned the need for international collaboration and solidarity as part of the preconditions to mobilize the resources to support these efforts. Specific reference was made to the role of OECD countries in mobilizing development assistance to help developing countries achieve their education for all goals.

Many interventions underlined the critical role of UNESCO in co-ordinating all EFA partners in the Dakar follow-up process. The Secretary-General of Education International commented: 'EI and its affiliates have worked in partnership with ministries and with a range of civil society organizations and we have also consistently maintained that UNESCO's capacity to be the lead agency in education should be strengthened; [and] we believe that there is one agency within the United Nations system that – with all the critical comments that I could give, because nothing of course is "hunky-dorey" – we strongly believe that this [agency] is UNESCO, and it should remain UNESCO.'

The Director-General of UNESCO highlighted some of the activities UNESCO has so far undertaken in the follow-up to Dakar, including the recent reform of the Collective Consultation of NGOs on EFA (see Box 3). He explained: 'We would like to play the role of impartial broker, facilitator and catalyst for promoting and furthering the collaboration between governments and civil society. We believe in the desirability of creating, through dialogue and partnership, an enduring national consensus on the goals, strategies and modalities for achieving EFA.'

Box 3. UNESCO–civil society mechanisms to promote partnership for EFA

The Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education for All (CCNGO/EFA) is a thematic partnership mechanism within the Education Sector to facilitate reflection, permanent dialogue and joint action between non-governmental and non-profit organizations (NGO) and UNESCO in the area of education for all with a view to strengthening co-operation between partners at all levels and promote lifelong learning. Joint activities are carried out in the areas of communication, policy formulation and dialogue, research, capacity building for local CSO and monitoring and evaluation.

The network of about 130 NGOs and other civil society organizations and networks working in education designated a co-ordination group, which includes four regional and two international NGO focal points, as well as a representative from the UNESCO–NGO Liaison Committee. The CCNGO/EFA is strengthening its regionalization to promote EFA partnership at all levels.

Section V

Concluding remarks

Political will and co-ordination

Civil society involvement has led to a more diversified scenario of education provision, contents and practices. It has also filled the gaps in ensuring learning opportunities for all age groups in a flexible and contextual manner. Since governments have the primary responsibility for ensuring the right to education, it is important that they play a strong leadership and co-ordinating role in the joint efforts to create learning societies where everyone has an opportunity to learn throughout life and where free primary education is a reality for all children.

The State needs to ensure that the activities of civil society are identified and analysed. As appropriate, they should be recognized, supported and/or mainstreamed into the public system and inspire education reform. There is a need to go beyond distinctions of formal and non-formal education and towards a diversified education system, which creates viable learning conditions for teachers and learners of all ages. Some civil society activities may not be in line with government policy, but, as the case of Ghana has shown, it is often these that raise pertinent questions about current policies and practices and suggest new ways of doing things differently in education. There has to be the space and acceptance for cutting-edge activities to further expand the vision on education for all and base national and cross-national education efforts on broad societal participation. It is necessary to tap on the wisdom and experience of all through systematic and ongoing policy dialogue between state and civil society, an area with scope for improvement. As the Director-General of UNESCO said in his closing remarks:

I mentioned four major roles as I perceive of the civil society in the context of EFA: alternate service providers, innovators, critics and advocates and, finally, policy partners. Definitely, the last role, which is new, is in my judgement the most important one and I am very happy to note that in many countries, like in Ghana, the civil society is emerging as a very important policy partner of the government in the context of EFA. I do hope that the example will be followed by other countries.

Given the acknowledgement of the strong and genuine role of the community, particularly the parent-teacher associations, community-based groups and other local civil society organizations in identifying education demand, mobilizing resources, participating in school management and monitoring the development of education content and practice, co-ordination by governments at decentralized levels becomes increasingly important. In fact, the deliberations showed a positive correlation between decentralization and the intensity of partnership between public authorities and civil society at sub-national levels that reinforces the need to develop EFA strategies in the general polity context of a country.

The political will is central for partnerships to become a reality, a point well summarized by the General-Secretary of Education International: ‘ . . . I think that you agree with me that if there is a will there is a way. And you can be sure that our will (that of the Global Campaign for Education) is very strong and we are ready to work with you to make that into a political will so as to achieve real results in each country.’

The Director-General reconfirmed UNESCO’s commitment to further strengthen civil society involvement through its programme and the Dakar follow-up partnership mechanisms, which it is in charge of co-ordinating at international and regional levels. UNESCO will also encourage

governments and National Commissions to talk with civil society and explore how viable mechanisms for consultation on issues related to EFA can be established or strengthened.

Participants from governments, civil society and bilateral agencies expressed their strong appreciation for the Director-General's initiative in convening the Special Session on the Involvement of Civil Society in Education for All, which had created a space for interesting, open and frank interaction on EFA issues in an international setting.

Practical steps

The preconditions identified in the discussions provided some insights as to what practical next steps should be taken to enhance civil society contributions and improve the dialogue between the state and civil society:

- ❑ Create and strengthen partnership mechanisms for information exchange and policy dialogue at local, national and international levels to enhance systematic civil society participation in EFA efforts.
- ❑ Support capacity building for CSO and civil society networks to ensure that they participate effectively and substantively in all aspects of formulating, implementing and evaluating education policies and programmes.
- ❑ Replicate the 'Special Sessions on Civil Society Involvement in EFA' at regional and national levels to further build consensus on the role and contribution of civil society and to strengthen collaboration for EFA.

Annex 1 Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura
Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

at the 46th Session of the International Conference on Education
Special Session on the Involvement of Civil Society in Education for All

IBE, Geneva, 8 September 2001

*Honourable Ministers of Education,
Representatives of civil society,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

It is a great pleasure to be with you today for this Special Session of the International Conference on Education (ICE). It is highly appropriate that this Special Session, on the theme of the involvement of civil society in Education for All (EFA), occurs on a day when citizens around the world, governments, politicians, voluntary associations, grassroots workers, teachers, children and many others are celebrating International Literacy Day. In doing so, they are expressing, directly or indirectly, their commitment to the goals shared by everyone in the global EFA movement.

We all have witnessed the lively discussions here at the 46th Session of the ICE. Major issues have been addressed, such as learning to live together in our conflict-ridden world, the complex relationship between globalization and education, and the urgent need to reinforce the ethos and practice of participation at all levels, not least in regard to EFA processes. Allow me to explain, therefore, why this Special Session has been convened.

Since becoming the Director-General of UNESCO in November 1999, I have made the promotion of dialogue with civil society one of my foremost concerns, especially with reference to EFA. At the meeting of the World Education Forum in Dakar in April 2000, I intervened to ensure the wider participation of civil society in that crucial event. Since then, the encouragement of dialogue with civil society on EFA-related matters has taken place largely at the working level. The significance of this Special Session is two-fold: for the first time, it takes this dialogue to a much higher level, at which civil society representatives interact with a large group of Ministers of Education; in addition, this is the first time that such a Special Session of the ICE has been devoted to the question of civil society.

By bringing together representatives from governments and civil society organizations (CSOs) on a single platform, this Special Session has both symbolic and substantive dimensions. It is symbolic by virtue of being a sign of the increasing recognition of the importance of civil society involvement in education, especially basic education. It is also an indication that partnership and collaboration are being pursued seriously and inclusively. I hope that this meeting will serve to symbolize the spirit of openness, dialogue and respect that must shape the relations between all partners in the EFA movement.

Today's meeting also has substantive content. We shall be sharing real experiences of how civil society supports EFA and how collaboration between governments and civil society is conducted in practice. We shall focus on regions of the world where the EFA challenge is greatest and where, as a result, the international community's priorities must lie in terms of technical and financial assistance. Moreover, our substantive purpose today must be to identify practical steps aimed at enhancing civil society's contribution to EFA and promoting better government/civil society relations.

I would like next to briefly consider what is meant by 'civil society' in regard to EFA. The term 'civil society' should be understood as inclusive of all groups and associations involved in EFA that are non-governmental and non-profit in nature. For UNESCO, civil society embraces NGOs and campaign networks, teacher unions and religious organizations, community associations and research networks, parents associations and professional bodies, student organizations and women's groups. I am aware that the definition of civil society is subject to much debate. Should it include political parties? Should it include the private or corporate sector? There is undoubtedly a need for greater clarity regarding who constitutes civil society and why. Different concepts and contextual experiences influence our understanding, and these call for further thought and analysis on our part. UNESCO will be most attentive to the discussion of such matters. However, in the context of EFA and the efforts to strengthen the EFA movement, I underline the importance of being as inclusive as possible.

Clearly, national situations differ enormously. State/civil society relations vary correspondingly. Some countries have no tradition of partnership between the state and civil society, and even the concept of civil society may seem alien and inapplicable. By contrast, some countries have benefited immensely from a widening participation of civil society in governance in general and in social development in particular. To reach this point, of course, a prolonged and painful struggle may have been endured but experience suggests that it ultimately bears fruit.

UNESCO believes that EFA will be achieved only if it is rooted in a broad-based societal movement and nourished by viable government/civil society partnerships. Our reasons are based on both principle and realism. The full achievement of the EFA goals requires that the marginalized and excluded are provided with educational opportunities. Civil society organizations are more capable than other EFA partners of reaching the unreached and, especially in the area of non-formal education, they have devised methods and approaches which are more attuned to the needs and life-conditions of the poor.

Moreover, we must acknowledge that, in the majority of developing countries, the public authorities have been unable to satisfy the demand for free and compulsory primary education of good quality for all children. The 113 million school-age children who are out-of-school, high rates of repetition and dropout, and the 875 million adults who are illiterate are evidence of the fact that the size and complexity of the EFA challenge are too great for governments alone to address, even with the best of intentions and effort.

Consequently, there is a need to both reinforce the state's responsibilities and complement its role in order to ensure quality basic education for all, especially for those who have been ill-served by or left out of mainstream education. Therefore we need partnership, drawing on the particular strengths of each partner.

In the tradition of modern democratic nation-states, elected governments are recognized as the legitimate authority to take decisions on national education policy choices, including such key areas as curriculum development, teacher education and system reform. Many states have shown great capacity in establishing national public education systems and ensuring, at least in principle, free education for all children and offering training opportunities for youth and adults. Governments manage the national education budget and, in the case of developing countries, mobilize and negotiate foreign aid. The public authorities, moreover, provide the framework of legislation, regulation, inspection and monitoring.

Civil society organizations cannot replace the state in the areas of its core educational responsibilities and authority. What, then, are the types of roles that CSOs play in regard to

education in general and EFA in particular? In considering this question, it is increasingly apparent that the role of CSOs cannot be reduced to that of merely complementing the efforts of the state; moreover, such a narrow conception ill serves the needs of the EFA movement. I shall now outline the four main roles performed by CSOs in regard to EFA.

In the first place, as suggested above, CSOs often act as alternative service providers where state-provided services are either absent or insufficient. CSOs have organized programmes for literacy, skills training and other forms of learning, thereby helping people to improve their livelihoods and living conditions. In many developing countries, CSOs have shouldered major responsibilities for non-formal education programmes entrusted to them by governments and funding agencies. CSOs have the advantage of being more flexible than the state, closer to the grassroots and local cultures and, in many cases, more innovative in approach. CSOs have emerged as leaders and major actors in the provision of non-formal and alternative education, with experience in linking education to other development sectors and building partnerships at different levels.

CSOs may also perform a second role, within and beyond national boundaries, as innovators, as sources of new thinking and new practices, especially concerning the impact of globalization on education. The EFA vision cannot remain fixed and immutable but must respond to changes and generate new initiatives. As well as the resource gap affecting the achievement of EFA, there is also an 'ideas gap' which CSOs can help to fill in collaboration with other EFA partners.

On the basis of the first two roles, CSOs often perform a third role as informed critics and advocates. The last decade witnessed the emergence of new forms of civil society expression and policy dialogue on a whole range of development issues. In regard to education, collective NGO campaigns were organized and national coalitions built to lobby for free and compulsory education of good quality for all children as well as education programmes for out-of-school youth and adults. Such campaigning has helped to raise important issues and to shape today's international EFA agenda.

Informed criticism and advocacy by CSOs also found expression through the EFA 2000 Assessment. In a path-breaking exercise, some 80 NGOs engaged in a collective evaluation of their own programmes and their role in and contribution to EFA. The evaluation demonstrated the relative strengths of NGOs/CSOs in such areas as community participation and organization, empowerment, literacy, community schools, reproductive health, and early childhood education. Particularly important for reaching the unreached are alternative education programmes for youth and adults (particularly women), nomads, the disabled, people living in isolated locations, and populations affected by armed conflict and displacement.

At the World Education Forum in Dakar, more than 300 NGO representatives came to attend the international NGO Consultation, which was jointly organized by the UNESCO/NGO Liaison Committee and the Collective Consultation of NGOs on EFA, with UNESCO's support. The NGOs drew up a joint communication and made valuable contributions to the drafting of the Dakar Framework for Action. Following a special request from the NGOs, I opened the World Education Forum to all participants who had come to the NGO Consultation, thereby encouraging direct interaction between NGOs, governments and development partners.

It came as no surprise, therefore, that the international community in Dakar agreed to acknowledge and support a new role of civil society in education: as policy partner. Governments, it was agreed, have 'an obligation to ensure that EFA goals and targets are reached and sustained' (para. 2 of the Dakar Framework for Action) but it was also recognized that this responsibility 'will be met most effectively through broad-based partnerships within countries' (para. 2). The participants in the

World Education Forum pledged themselves to 'ensure the engagement and participation of civil society in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of strategies for educational development' (para. 8). This pledge highlights the new consensus in acknowledging the role of CSOs not only as implementing agencies and service providers, as innovators, and as informed critics and advocates, but also as policy partners. The key question, of course, is how we can move from this clear recognition of civil society's policy role to genuine participation and partnership at the country level.

National policy dialogue may at times be a cumbersome process, but it is essential for moving the EFA agenda forward. UNESCO is strongly committed to the principle that civil society should participate more fully in the policy process and we very much encourage the development of policy partnership between government and civil society. At the same time, however, we know that different local situations will generate different opportunities, modalities and outcomes. The space for civil society participation may be very limited in some countries today. In such cases, scope must be allowed for circumstances to change and new opportunities to arise so that more democratic and open political processes may develop.

There is no single recipe, no ideal model, and no uniform blueprint to guide our actions regarding the involvement of civil society in EFA. In each country context, we must develop a detailed knowledge of the contributions of civil society to the different EFA themes and goals. Such information is not easily available, so much so, in fact, that there may well be an under-reporting of EFA achievement and progress deriving from the activities of CSOs.

Questions must be raised about how to organize a meaningful dialogue with a constituency as large and diverse as civil society. Who has the legitimacy to represent the interest and opinion of civil society organizations in dialogue with the government? Who can speak for whom? How does civil society's role fit within or alongside established mechanisms of electoral politics and democratic representation? And what is the real capacity at the level of civil society to negotiate policy choices in substantive areas of EFA? These and other questions need to be seriously addressed within a perspective committed to increasing civil society participation in policy dialogue.

UNESCO is convinced that a new culture of policy dialogue for EFA is needed if we are to connect the international political will for civil society participation with national and local realities. In general terms, the new policy culture should be participatory, democratic, open, transparent and accountable. It should transcend hierarchical and institutional barriers and should focus on issues of direct relevance to people's lives.

I would like now to briefly mention how UNESCO has been actively seeking to foster the participation of CSOs in policy dialogue within the post-Dakar follow-up process, as today's Special Session bears witness. For example, international civil society networks and NGOs from the different regions were invited to the first meeting last November of the Working Group on EFA. At this meeting, the NGOs drew attention to the importance of decentralization in national EFA efforts. Joint presentations by government and civil society representatives drew attention to NGO roles in innovative efforts to provide EFA at the community level.

UNESCO also invited NGOs to a consultation on the Global Initiative for mobilizing resources for EFA, held in Paris in March 2001. Both national and international NGOs stressed the need to include civil society in all stages of the planning, formulation and implementation of EFA. The NGOs emphasized how important it is for international agencies to support capacity building that will enable national NGOs and other civil society organizations to play their accorded role in the EFA movement.

In July, UNESCO and the UNESCO/NGO Liaison Committee co-organized the 2001 Annual Meeting of the Collective Consultation of NGOs on EFA in Bangkok, an event which I consider a milestone in our partnership with civil society. About 100 NGOs from around the world agreed on a new partnership mechanism for EFA that will facilitate and accelerate dialogue, joint reflection, research, and capacity building as well as monitoring and evaluation.

Partnership between governments and civil society at the national level was one of the central themes of the Bangkok meeting. Strategies and activities were proposed that would reinforce the involvement of civil society, including capacity building in policy dialogue and studies of specific country experiences. NGOs also expressed their hope that governments and UNESCO National Commissions would explore various options for creating more space for consultation with civil society. Some NGOs suggested the idea of a protocol to support the dialogue. The meeting also emphasized the need to strengthen civil society coalitions for EFA at the national level; such coalitions will help to build consensus around the priorities and proposals to be brought into the national policy dialogue on education. In addition, international NGOs and NGOs from the different regions agreed to join the co-ordination team, which will work with UNESCO to facilitate the implementation of the activities, proposed and support the network across the regions.

UNESCO, as the organization mandated to co-ordinate the EFA partners and maintain their collaborative momentum, has a key role to play in nurturing the new culture of policy dialogue. The Dakar follow-up activities just mentioned illustrate the direction UNESCO wishes to take. We would like to play the role of impartial broker, facilitator and catalyst for promoting and furthering the collaboration between governments and civil society. We believe in the desirability of creating, through dialogue and partnership, an enduring national consensus on the goals, strategies and modalities for achieving EFA.

It is vital that the diversity of voices in the EFA movement is heard and, whenever possible, harmonized. At the same time, UNESCO is keen to encourage intellectual exchange and knowledge creation so that the EFA vision can be continuously refreshed. The 'ideas gap' must be addressed through debate and dialogue so that the EFA agenda moves forward but within a shared vision. UNESCO, therefore, will continue to encourage interaction among all EFA partners through the various consultative mechanisms, working groups and fora that exist. The role of informal contacts as well as formal structures is important. UNESCO will encourage governments and National Commissions to talk with civil society and explore how viable mechanisms for consultation on issues related to EFA can be established or strengthened.

We are optimistic because the seeds for the growth of a new culture of EFA policy dialogue do exist in many countries. As stated earlier, there is no single blueprint suitable for all circumstances but there are ideas, experiences and innovations to learn from. Let us listen and learn together.

Thank you.