

SUMMARY OF ARABEFA 3rd MEETING

The third meeting of the Regional Mechanism for Education for All in the Arab Region (ARABEFA) convened in Beirut on the 21st January 2002, at the UNESCO-Beirut office to continue to build momentum towards the Dakar EFA goals. Its paramount purpose, as a collaborative mechanism, was to review the status of EFA in the Region and assess the progress towards the formulation of the National Plans and further reinforce partnership between all actors committed to the Dakar Framework of Action.

A total of 21 participants attended the meeting, representing the following institutions: UN convening Agencies (UNICEF-MENA Regional Office in Amman, UNFPA-Beirut, UNDP-Beirut), UNRWA-Amman, ESCWA, UNESCO (Amman, Beirut, Cairo, Doha, Paris and Rabat), UNESCO-UIS (EFA Observatory-Montreal), NGOs (Arab Resource Collective, CID) and ARABEFA Ambassador (Dr Hassan Ibrahim, Chairman Kuwait Society for the Advancement of Arab Children).

A central concern of the group was to assess what progress has been made in the Region in the development of the national plans and to identify means to overcome the constraints, especially related to time and involvement. ARABEFA Secretariat and UNESCO-Paris made significant presentations as input to the ensuing group work and discussions. Based on the ARABEFA indications, all countries in the region have formed their EFA National Teams. However, the lack of commitment and interest from the countries themselves make the process even more complicated to advance. In addition, the importance of the UN/Donors Support Team at national level was strongly highlighted as a major tool for supporting the EFA National Teams. This mechanism must be re-activated and involvement of all partners be tightened up in support of the EFA National Team through the mobilization of the Country Offices of UN partners by the Heads/Representatives of Agencies.

Discussions then dwelt at length on necessity to have fully integrated plans at the national level, government-led, coherent and credible, focusing therefore on the criteria presented by UNESCO-Paris that will be subsequently modified. A new list of criteria for a "credible" plan, will be adopted by ARABEFA and then translated to Arabic in view of a larger dissemination in the Region to assist the countries in the formulation of their plans.

The group also finalized the Regional Program for ARABEFA that consists principally in building capacities at the regional level through a series of Regional Workshops. The following was thus adopted:

1. "Quality of Basic Education" will be organized by UNESCO in Doha in April 2002
2. "Girls education" will be organized by UNICEF in Cairo in April 2002
3. "Literacy and Non-Formal Education" will be organized in cooperation with ALECSO in Tunis in May 2002
4. "ECCE" will be organized by UNICEF in Amman in May 2002
5. "Teacher Training" will be organized by UNESCO in Beirut around mid-June 2002
6. "Regional Technical Evaluation Consultation" will be organized by UNESCO during September 2002 and Beirut has been provisionary proposed.

Within this framework, a lengthy discussion took place as regard the essential role and participation of NGOs in the EFA process in an effort to find ways and means of activating and facilitating their participation, particularly in countries there is still clear reluctance to involve NGOs and civil society in EFA. Their role in the planning process was emphasized but it needs further encouragement. However, as an initial stage, it was commonly decided that NGOs would be associated to the capacity building workshops and that funds would be raised to that effect.

As a conclusion, countries in the region need to be convinced that donors and international organizations are joining hands with them in the EFA effort to facilitate teamwork. Regional coordination calls for more involvement from the partner agencies and all stakeholders if we are to meet the 2002 objective.