

Unesco to Assist Governments Strengthen Education Systems

Dakar, Senegal - The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has come to the aid of governments to assist them in replacing costly, rigid and culturally alienating educational structures with less expensive delivery systems that are more diversified and universally affordable without sacrificing quality.

UNESCO also intends to provide support to the development of basic education services that will be targeting the poorest, illiterate adults, children outside the school systems, including those at work, on the street or refugees through a strategy involving both the formal education system and all the alternatives offered by the non-formal sector. Addressing the World Education Forum Wednesday, UNESCO Director General Koichiro Matsuura said basic education must become a field which is free of all forms of exclusion and discrimination.

Other plans to be undertaken by Unesco for various education support to governments include the creation of an education system whose contents and methods are geared to that country's social and cultural realities while including the linguistic and indigenous potential with regards to skills and practices and the values that underpin society, which must be central to the education system. To harness the modern information and communication technologies for all, the potential of these technologies would be exploited in order to broaden the reach of basic education, particularly in the direction of the excluded and underprivileged groups and also enhance and improve classroom tea-



ching. "These four ways of achieving an education that is authentic, accessible to all without exclusion or discrimination, modern and universally affordable will provide each individual with the keys to diversified and virtually limitless knowledge.

"This is the type of education which can inspire a culture of peace, a universal culture that all peoples, all human beings must share in order to give meaning to their common humanity. This is the type of education for which we are determined to fight," Matsuura said. He said the broad vision of Education for All proclaimed in Jomtien 10 years ago has lost nothing of its wisdom and relevance but that what the conference did not see were the

sometimes tragic events of the decade, such as the proliferation of ethnic conflicts, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the process of globalisation and the ever-increasing rift between the rich and poor affecting all societies and consequently education systems. Matsuura while noticing the remarkable progress made by some countries since Jomtien, said the fact remains that there has been a straying from the original objectives which include formal schooling which

has been the main preoccupation in the field of education, entailing neglect of non-formal avenues of learning.

Many countries have been slow to re-define their educational needs, in particular concerning educational content reflecting culture and corresponding to the specific needs of each society and the continued increase in the inequalities within education systems resulting in the poorest of the poor, minority groups and people with special learning needs hardly being taken into account or may have been excluded from the mainstream of education.

Other areas include that of the "digital divide" which is said to have marginalised the poorest social sectors even further, little development in early childhood education which still favours the better-off urban population and also the under-financing of basic education both by most countries that provide less than two percent of gross domestic product on average and by donor community which also puts in two percent of development aid.

Matsuura was optimistic that the Dakar Forum would manage to adopt a global framework for action which represents the international community's clear and irreversible commitment to meeting the basic learning needs of all children. "The last day in Dakar must be the first day of collective and victorious struggle to achieve Educational for All."

Obasanjo in Dakar Calls for Radical Reforms



Dakar - Africa's development and progress will remain circumscribed for as long as ignorance prevails as a result of inadequate education, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo told delegates at the ongoing World Education Forum in Dakar Thursday.

He said the continent cannot expect to be part of the knowledge-driven, information-conscious hi-tech controlled, and economically competitive world of the 21st century, unless it embarks on intensive human capital formation process through education.

"Africa has come into the century with a developmental deficit which we have to rid ourselves of," Obasanjo said, adding that the 'deficit' of the education sector is a particularly a large one."

African governments therefore must radically alter their education policies, he said.

"For planners of education in Africa, the turn of this century ought to mean that education policies can no longer be a matter of 'business as usual. Education has to be elevated from the lower order ranking, where it has languished since independence, mostly because of lack of resources," he told some 1500 delegates.

He said the new concept for education in Africa must among other things produce Africans who are world citizens, capable of partaking in and contributing to global technological, economic and cultural knowledge.

Obasanjo, whose country has a 46-percent illiterate adult population, regretted that African countries are still grappling with the provision of basic education when other parts of the world are already harnessing opportunities presented by the new information technological revolution.

He also challenged donors to help African countries achieve their Education for All obligations, particularly in the areas of debt forgiveness and international co-operation."

"The principles of international solidarity demands no less," the Nigerian leader said.

Editorial by
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Director of the UNDP Bureau of Communication World Education Forum Spokesperson

Kofi Annan, Africa and the UN

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granted by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the World Forum on Education, was officially over. But as his spokesperson prepared to announce the end of the question period, Kofi Annan took the floor and asked the directors of the Forum's five organising agencies (UNDP, World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA) to address the audience and explain the objectives of each of their organisations regarding the central theme of the symposium: basic education for all by the year 2015. The UN Secretary General's gesture comes as no surprise to those familiar with the man and his vision. Kofi Annan has made tireless efforts to obtain the collaboration of all United Nations system agencies in what he calls "pooling, not pulling". In other words, Mr. Annan's vision is one of consensus management to create synergy among UN agencies. A quiet, deliberate leader who takes time over his answers, he advocates "quiet revolution", i.e., quiet, effective action to produce major reforms without making a fuss. Within international living memory, rarely has a United Nations Secretary-General stressed the economic and social dimensions of the UN's actions, the way Kofi Annan does, rather than their political dimension, which is easier to describe. We should keep this outlook in mind to gain a perspective on the plea he gave to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society in the address he made at the opening of the World Forum on Education: "Each in their own field, a variety of NGOs have made remarkable contributions to the progress of education in many countries, and now they are coming together to lead a global campaign. He added: "Today, let me say this to the NGOs, without your skills, your energy and your presence in even the most remote areas, we cannot win the battle of girls' education. And I promise we will listen to you".

This open attitude is typical of Kofi Annan, currently on a tour of Africa, a continent for which he has obtained so many initiatives and major contributions from experts, philanthropists and donors, in order to put an end to the vicious cycle of poverty and conflict. ●

World Education Report 2000

Viviane Wade Proposes Alliance for Women's Right to Education

Dakar - Senegalese First Lady, Viviane Wade, launched a 'Health and Education' projects in Dakar Thursday, saying it would help "educate families and children on the basic elements of hygiene and nutrition".

Mrs Wade also said she would write to all First Ladies to form a 'Women's Alliance for Women's Right to Education'.

She spoke at the launch of the 'World Education Report 2000' by UNESCO director-general, Koichiro Matsuura at the ongoing World Education Forum which winds up in the Senegalese capital Friday.

She and other colleagues would act as spokespersons for hundreds of millions of women around the world who are deprived of education. Mrs. Wade, who has long been active in adult education for inner-city women, has set up a 'Health and Education' project to "educate families and children in the basic elements of hygiene and nutrition".

Presenting the education report in the company of Mrs Wade, Matsuura said the essence of the report is encapsulated the theme, The Right to Education.

The first chapter of the 178-page

report recapitulates the commitments made by the international community over the last fifty years. It includes the texts of the International Convention on Economic and Social Rights of 1966; the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1988; the World Declaration on Education For All of Jomtien in 1990, among others.

"The performance of the international community has not met with expectations and considerable efforts remain to be made", he said with regard to those commitments.

The other three chapters give an overview of the different education sectors: basic education, secondary education and higher education.

The UNESCO boss declared that in spite of the priority accorded to basic education because it represents a fundamental human right, higher education and technical training will not be ignored by the institution.

"Because of the disparities in access to scientific and technical knowledge that will be created by globalisation and new technologies, UNESCO has a duty to make greater efforts in this area," he declared.