

E-Nine Countries

"Dakar Made a Difference"

If there is one thing that came out clearly in the Dakar Education For All forum that was not emphasised in Jomtien ten years ago, in the words of the E9 region spokesperson, Prof. Michael Omolewa, that thing would be - participation.

"When I was coming for this meeting, I thought this was going to be another Jomtien, but now it is clear that things are going to be different," he said soon after the adoption of the Dakar Framework of Action Friday.

"Jomtien was a colossal failure because people made empty promises. We are just beginning again. Now we are saying Jomtien should not be allowed to take place again," he said.

According to Omolewa, a number of things have clearly emerged out of the Dakar Forum. Firstly, the preparation of the framework of action has been a participatory exercise which climaxed when governments, non-governmental organisations, the United Nations and donors came together and agreed on the way forward.

"We may not agree on the content of the framework, but we agree that there has been a participatory negotiation," he said.

For E-9 countries, which Omolewa represents, plans for post-Dakar are in top gear. With a new vision and strategy, the region is set to provide quality universal basic education tailored to empower its people and communities.

Non-governmental organisations, some sixty of which participated in an International Consultation in Dakar before the opening of the three-day World Education Forum that ended Friday evening in Dakar, have denounced the Framework of Action adopted by the meeting.

"The Framework of Action does not meet our expectations. It is incomplete. The commitments are not tied to a schedule. It is soft in terms of financing. We hoped there would be a commitment to recognise that 6 percent of the gross national product of each state should be allocated to education - the threshold recommended by the Delors Commission - and 8 percent of development aid budgets should be allocated to basic education".

According to the NGOs, whose statement was read publicly before the larger meeting wound up, the Framework for Action is weak because it contains no mechanisms for transparency and accountability.

"This we deeply deplore".

The text on the global initiative is "vague and lacks details". The NGOs reported being stunned by the contrast between the obligations that need to be fulfilled by governments of countries in the South and the relative lack of comparable commitments on the part of Northern countries and multilateral institutions.

However, the statement thanked the governments and multilateral institutions for "your willingness to stand by our side on this important task".

He said the Dakar education forum has provided the turning point for E-9, in which the methodology, scope, content and goals of education has changed.

The group is constituted by the nine of the most populous countries in the world. These are includes Egypt, China, Nigeria, Brazil, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mexico, Pakistan and India. They account for nearly half of the world's illiterate population.

Some of the countries in the group are also among the most indebted in the world. "Because of big populations, these countries have big employment problems, big health problems and big education problems," he said.

"We have also listened to the comments made by donors. They are all now saying publicly that they should give a little bit more," he said, but war-

ned developing countries against folding their hands and doing nothing instead of joining hands in partnerships.

He said with the lessons learnt from failures to meet Jomtien goals, the new goals set for 2015, are less likely to be frustrated with the new vision. The region's efforts to educate its people who make up nearly half of the world's six billion people.

The group will, however, need a strong foundation in their education reform, if their post-Dakar goal of providing universal primary education is to be met by 2015.

Perhaps the most important outcome, as Prof. Omolewa pointed out, is the fact that the actual people, women and children on the ground, were also present to share their experiences and views on what kind of education is needed.



Caribbean

"Forum was not interactive enough"



Jamaican Minister, who expected that the Caribbean region would redouble efforts over the next ten years so as to achieve universal education around 2010.

He was pleased to note that since Jomtien, there has been a groundswell of political will favourable to education in particular and development in general.

Asia-Pacific

"Forum was a Success"



Dakar - The Asian and Pacific delegation to the World Education Forum which ended Friday in Dakar has expressed satisfaction with what has been achieved at the Forum.

They said unlike the Jomtien conference in 1990, the Dakar Forum has been able to raise awareness on the challenges posed by EFA which participants now realise is a much more difficult task to achieve than they did at Jomtien.

The Chairperson of the drafting committee for the Asia and Pacific region, Abhimanyu Singh, who works for the Indian ministry of Education, said people are now more aware of the nature of challenges in meeting the EFA goals.

"We have now realised that there is need for everybody, that is, the donors, international agencies, civil society and governments to really work together. The major task now remains that of political commitment to the EFA goals and there is the realisation that there has to be much stronger political commitment by governments," Singh said.

He said the forum was able to focus on areas that need special attention, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia such as issues concerning girls education, children in difficult circumstances like the disabled and those geographically isolated and affected by displacement because of civil conflicts.

Singh said the forum realised that it was not just within the powers of governments alone to implement the EFA goals, but also needed the serious involvement of international partners like the donors and non-governmental organisations in the monitoring of the EFA programmes.

"I think we have achieved the objectives of the conference. This is a conference that put much emphasis on education as a human right of all children and citizens, HIV/AIDS and measures to address this and education programmes to promote mutual understanding, peace and development. We will now learn from experience," Singh said.

The regional objectives and strategies of the Asia and Pacific goals and targets for 2015 include, Early childhood care and education, universal basic education, basic learning and skills programmes, learning achievements, literacy and continuing education, education of women and girls and the elimination of gender disparities.

Short and Sharp

Participants at the World Education Forum held in Dakar from 26 to 28 April have expressed the desire to work together in the next fifteen years to achieve the goal of Education For All (EFA).

Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, UNESCO Director-General, said at a post-conference briefing We will do our best to respond to the Dakar appeal by implementing the action framework which we unanimously approved. Matsuura said that the task facing the international community in this regard was enormous, but

that by working co-operatively success could be obtained. He appealed to the press to contribute to this task through constructive criticism. The outcome of the commitments made by the international community over the last fifty years is far from meeting expectations. However, we should recognise that great efforts have been made in the field of education in particular. In 1948, the year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, less than half of adults knew how to read or write a simple text in at least one language; today, 4 of 5 adults around the world can do so.

Mr. Tom Bediako, the spokesperson for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) said he was willing to talk and work with other partners in Education For All by the year 2015, although he expressed some reservations on the possibility of this being achieved especially regarding the unreliable fundraising mechanisms.

Mr. A.S.H.K. Sadique, the Bangladesh Minister of Education, emphasised the need to close the yawning gap in education.

Sadique said his country has surpassed the Jomtien objectives. But Dakar remains a great source of hope for all countries, since it has laid down a general framework acceptable to all countries.

Ms. Marie Minna, Canadian Minister of International Cooperation and representative of the donor countries, said that the world needed egalitarian and equitable education with the necessary contributions from developing countries.

Minna said donors have decided to place emphasis on project packages over isolated projects, and concentrate on women's and girls education as well as catering to the needs of marginalised children, by co-operating with civil society

Ms Clare Short, UK Secretary of State for Development Cooperation. Africa and Asia risk being left behind by the globalisation movement. It is a moral duty for Northern countries to help weaker countries, but it must be recognised it is hard to set up a partnership to finance all the costs of Education for All. Developing countries must make more efforts to prove that they themselves view basic education as important. The NGOs' proposal to set up an international development fund for basic education is dangerous. We are convinced that money is not enough to achieve the goal of Education for All. Political will is also vital and national and international civil society must put pressure on governments to obtain genuine political will. It is not the responsibility of an organisation such as the Forum on Education to force governments to act in one way or another.

Mr. Mark Malloch Brown, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) "An educated child is a source of wealth for the family and for the country. The World Forum on Education For All is proof we are determined to find solutions to illiteracy among children and adults", he said.

