

A Tool for African Renaissance

It was on 6 December 1999 in Johannesburg, South Africa, that African Ministers of Education, representatives of the civil society and international development agencies defined the sub-Saharan Africa regional Framework of action, in view of the Dakar World Education Forum.

In their regional platform, African Ministers of Education, representatives of civil society and of international development agencies, called for clear identification of priorities in the field of education, in accordance with the requirements of the new vision of the African Renaissance at the social, economic and cultural levels.

In concrete terms, it called for the improvement, at all levels and in every social stratum, equal access to education, says the African document submitted to the Forum's Secretariat.

To achieve this, it would be appropriate for African countries to systematically review their laws in conformity with development objectives, to develop education policies.

It invites governments in the region to mobilise and re-allocate the financial means for the reinforcement of basic education. Making education sustainable and accessible to all through the work of the various actors in the sector should be achieved in close co-operation with central governments on the one hand, and local authorities, schools, communities and families on the other hand.

The Americas and The Caribbean

Educate to Overcome Poverty, Inequalities and Exclusion

Countries in the region believe that the diversity of the situation from one country to another, as well as the heterogeneity of conditions within each country make it difficult to formulate a homogeneous strategy aimed at achieving the objectives and fulfilling the commitments made by all of them. This implies the adoption of specific approaches that would enable the American States to convert their regional commitments into national objectives, based on the means at their disposal.

However, they feel that this diversity encompasses the common denominator of poverty, inequalities and exclusion that affect many families in the countries. They are therefore committed to giving priority to this segment of the population through differentiated strategies and objectives.

Besides, American and Caribbean countries commit themselves to setting up, at national level, co-operation mechanisms in the field of public policy that assert the joint responsibility of State, private sector and society in general, in the definition and implementation of specific objectives.

Street children, working children or children belonging to minorities or nomadic communities, those living in remote regions or countries torn apart by armed conflicts, HIV/AIDS orphans, imprisoned and disabled children, should, henceforth be given very special attention.

In the plan of action, African governments also briefed their partners on the overall efforts they have made to meet the objectives set during the World Conference on Education for All held in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand.

These were made amidst several obstacles and exceptionally hard conditions.

In the last ten years, many countries have been involved in reconstruction and reform processes in the wake of the conflicts that had torn them apart. However, there have been setbacks in nearly one-third of the states in the region in situations of war and civil conflicts.

Many of these countries still suffer from inadequate material and institutional infrastructures, as well as the usual harsh and brutal implementation of structural adjustment programmes, increase

Educate to Overcome

Countries in the Americas and the Caribbean met in Santo Domingo from 10-12 February, 2000, and endorsed a regional framework of action in which they identified the challenges to be tackled in the next 15 years to promote EFA. These impinge on the eradication of poverty and all forms of exclusion and inequality in the region.

They also commit themselves to reviewing their activities in a regular and transparent manner.

Information, communication and partnerships with the media are privileged means of achieving the EFA objectives.

The framework action plan seeks to encourage greater international co-operation to help overcome intra-regional disparities by giving priority to the efforts of countries faced with the greatest number of obstacles in achieving their objectives.

Besides, the countries of the region have decided to increase social investment for early childhood protection by expanding opportunities for access to early-learning programmes and by improving the scope of the pre-school curriculum.

of the debt burden, the distortions of the global economic system, bad governance, inefficient use of scarce resources, drought and flooding.

Moreover, the prevalence of AIDS and armed conflicts continue to have a negative impact on education in Africa. During the ten years following Jomtien, only 10 countries were able to achieve universal primary education. Fifty-six percent of the 41 million school-age children who are not in school are female.

It is precisely in Southern Africa that equality between boys and girls appears to be gaining grounds. It is also in the southernmost part of the Sahara that gender inequalities are the most striking.

The African document also notes that where enrolment and literacy rates are high, the gender gap tends to be narrower, and therefore called for the intensification of female education and literacy. ●

THE NINE MOST POPULOUS COUNTRIES

Eradicate Adult Illiteracy

Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan, the nine most populous countries in the world, gathered under the auspices of the regional group called E-9, in Recife, Brazil, from 31 January to 2 February 2000 to set their priorities in view of the Dakar Forum. This group, which alone accounts for more than 50% of the world population, devotes attention to both adult literacy and universal basic education.

The group of the nine most populous countries in the world agreed in Recife to give top national priority to EFA, and particularly to the eradication of adult illiteracy. They also plan to increase the number of students who actually complete their primary, secondary or tertiary studies, and to fully integrate children with special education needs in normal schools.

Besides, the E-9 countries plan to effect changes in their legislation, in order to generalize basic education, and integrate the principles of EFA as part of their position to be adopted at the Forum

To promote universal access of schools to Internet and to all forms of electronic media, they recommend the setting up of national systems of network communication.

Furthermore, the E-9 countries attach great importance to moral values in basic education programmes, by emphasising the importance of democratic values such as justice, honesty, tolerance and respect for diversity and equity for teachers and students.

It requires the improvement of quality, the acquisition of both general and professional education and technological skills at the national levels.

Education of the youth on HIV/AIDS, as well as the continuation of the needed reforms in the field of

education management so as to improve administration and supervision are also important.

Furthermore, the E-9 reiterated their determination to increase resources allocation to EFA by central and local governments. However, they specified that the civil society, NGOs, productive sectors and enterprises should contribute and also be involved in Education for all. Some of the E-9 countries expressed their disappointments over the many constraints they are faced in with whenever they try to mobilize adequate resources for basic education.

Consequently, the E-9 invite international development agencies to renew and examine their strategies in accordance with the national plans and priorities, and to elaborate a better coordinated framework of action to provide international assistance aimed at quality education for all.

Thus, they appealed to the international community to support EFA in each country; facilitate debt alleviation and cancellation; and promote literacy, health and reduction of social tensions.

The E-9 framework of action commended the efforts deployed by the countries since Jomtien and the summit of their heads of state on EFA in New Delhi in December 1993. ●

Combining knowledge with Experience as a Reference Guide

The Framework of action for the Arab region, entitled Education for All in Arab States: Renewal of Commitment, sets the outline of a programme covering a ten-year period (2000/2010).

Arab and North Africa countries aim at achieving two main objectives in this framework. The first one involves the setting up of a guide which will act as reference framework for all educational actors in the region, through a series of strategies, plans and programmes whose concern is to ensure the success of the goals of Education for All. The second objective consists in ensuring that their specific concerns can be better expressed during the discussion on the challenges of Education for All, at the Dakar Forum.

For Arab states, education is a hidden treasure, the product of open and diversified access to knowledge and experience. Therefore, the notion of learning continues throughout life as one of the keys to the 21st Century.

The interpretation of this notion goes beyond the traditional distinction between formal schooling and permanent training. Its function is precisely to meet the challenges of a fast changing world.

For Arab states, learning is at the heart of human development. It is the source of enlightenment and the bases of survival. Consequently, education should enable every individual to gather, process, organise and use information. From this point of view, learning is the key to sustainable human development. ●