

Education has to be a community affair a focus for development. This is one of the novel ideas that emerged at the World Education Forum which winds up in Dakar Friday.

Discussants in a workshop on 'Education and Social Values' agreed that countries should take institutional steps to change the content of education. That means introducing values such as democracy, tolerance, peace and not just education designed to meet the needs of the markets.

The problem of the use of information and communication technologies in basic education, evaluating learning, meeting special education needs and the need for teachers to live comfortably were at the heart of the debate in other workshops.

Proper use of information and communication technologies can make basic education available to anyone, anywhere, anytime, the workshop concluded. While new technologies are not a panacea, participants wondered whether it was possible to achieve education for all without them. The panellists also wondered what technologies were appropriate, and seemed to lean towards all the newest technologies such as the Internet.

The workshop on evaluating learning stressed the positive and

Making Education A Community Affair

negative influence of the family and social environment on scholastic performances. Even teachers fall victim to the social environment in underdeveloped countries that do not promote good wages and devalue the status of educators in society.

Countries need to integrate students with special needs into the educational system. Total integration is desired by all, but the path to achieving it is neither direct, nor clear, nor easy.

A survey conducted by UNESCO in 1985 concluded that countries where teachers promote teaching all children in ordinary classrooms, were forced to do so by the law.



Debt Relief for Education A Victory for Poor Countries

Debt relief can certainly not finance all the educational projects in poor countries, but it can make a major contribution, if resources derived from debt conversion are used to fund education and literacy.

This is the position that emerged at the end of a workshop on, Using Debt Relief for Education, organised at the ongoing World Education Forum in Dakar Thursday.

"Poor countries never benefit from the resources generated by the debt" and, according to Ms. Eveline Herfkens, Netherlands Development Co-operation minister, "financial constraints are obstacles to the growth and development of Education in those countries". As a result, she added, "the recent decision to reduce debts and transfer the payments to budgets used to fund social projects is a victory".

Ms. Herfkens also indicated that education and literacy should be accorded priority.

According to the other participants, globally one percent of total

bilateral aid and five percent of World Bank are spent on education. "Of these amounts, only 12% goes to basic levels and less than a third benefits education in the countries with the lowest enrolment rates".

Worse yet, "World Bank loans for education in sub-Saharan Africa only represented 13% of education spending over the last three years".

the Director of the Human Development Bureau of the World Bank, Eduardo Doryan, pointed out that the most important thing is to "make wise use of regularly allocated resources, because with minimal means some countries have achieved a 100% enrolment rate".

He also noted that growth and education go together, adding that most of the 33 poor countries identified for debt relief were African.

The participants said that governments around the world hold the keys to new development opportunities, adding, "but what we need now is a different education that excludes no one." ●



Britain Seeks International Support for Education Reforms

Dakar, Senegal - Britain has called on governments attending the World Education Forum in Dakar to demand that the international community financially back countries committed to universal primary education.

Britain said that it is vital that the Framework of Action to be adopted Friday at the end of the Forum sends a clear signal that the international community will back meaningful reform and that funding agencies allocate significant additional resources to support primary and basic education, where governments are committed to the objective.

Global education funding today stands at about 120-130 billion U.S. dollars and is mostly provided by governments themselves who contribute about 74 percent of the total budget, while donors contribute a mere three percent with the private sector and community putting in the remaining 23 percent.

Britain's Secretary of State for International Development, Clare Short who addressed the forum Thursday assured her government's further support to basic education, particularly in the poorest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the regions with the worst education indicators.

Short said while all development resources from the World Bank and the IMF should be allocated in support of a nationally-agreed and nationally-led poverty reduction strategy with basic education being a key component of these strategies, funding agencies at the same time should not support a multitude of isolated education projects which crumble when external funding comes to an end, but must work with governments to help them deliver high quality education for all.

She noted that the biggest barrier to education is poverty itself and that many education systems impose costs of access, school fees and the requirement for school uniforms which are a further barrier to education for the poorest. Short said there is need to address the improvement of educational opportunities of the poor to reduce the direct and indirect costs that make education prohibitively expensive for them.

Speaking at the same meeting, UNICEF Executive Director, Carol Bellamy called on donor countries to accelerate the process of debt forgiveness saying that debt should be forgiven immediately for countries that have a viable Education for All plan that can replace a poverty reduction strategy plans.

Bellamy said education for all would remain a dream until the deep issue of poverty that keeps children out of school and often makes child labour necessary is addressed.

"Unless the 250 million children presently caught up in child labour are provided with meaningful and affordable educational opportunities of quality equivalent to that provided their fortunate peers, we are wasting strategic human resources and perpetuating poverty in the next generation," Bellamy said.

She said it is a global scandal that the vast majority of the more than 110 million school-age children out of school are girls. ●