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Newsletter of the World Education Forum in Dakar

**Let Us shape
the Future**

Ten Years After Jomtien NEW DEAL ON THE CARDS IN DAKAR

The three-day World Education Forum, which begins in Dakar on Wednesday, should provide the international community with a major opportunity to discuss and verify the level of implementation of the objectives of Education for All endorsed 10 years ago in Jomtien, Thailand, and set priorities for the new millennium.

The meeting, which will be attended by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, a number of Heads of State, the principal bilateral and multilateral aid agencies and NGOs, will deliberate on reports presented at a donors series of regional meetings held between December 1999 and February 2000.

It is generally agreed that none of the objectives set by the major United Nations conferences in the 1990s, on girls' and women's education (Beijing), the protection of the environment (Rio), controlling population growth (Cairo), poverty and exclusion (Copenhagen) and the observation of human rights (Vienna), can be achieved without education.

The plenary sessions will address topics such as the quality of basic education, effective use of human and financial resources, strengthening the role of communi-

ties and civil society, promoting democracy and citizenship education.

Furthermore, topics as important and timely as girls' education, the abolition of child labour, poverty reduction, health and nutrition, HIV and AIDS, education technology, education and business, improving school management and the role of the media are also on the forum's agenda.

These will be trashed out during round tables to be organised by specialised agencies, Ngos and other groups, and the civil society. ●

Mr Raphaël Ndiaye, National NGOs co-ordinator of Senegal

'The NGOs will make their presence felt at the Dakar forum'

Dakar, Senegal (PANA) - The World Education Forum which is taking place on African soil for the first time should provide all the actors, official, institutional and civil society stakeholders with an opportunity to take stock of Education for All worldwide "in order to build new consensus" to strengthen and advance the policies, programmes, initiatives and actions undertaken since Jomtien in 1990.

In an interview with EF, Mr. Raphael Ndiaye, national coordinator of the NGOs of Senegal, the country hosting the Forum, says all the NGOs attending the forum would "bring their force to bear and influence the proceedings" in Dakar.

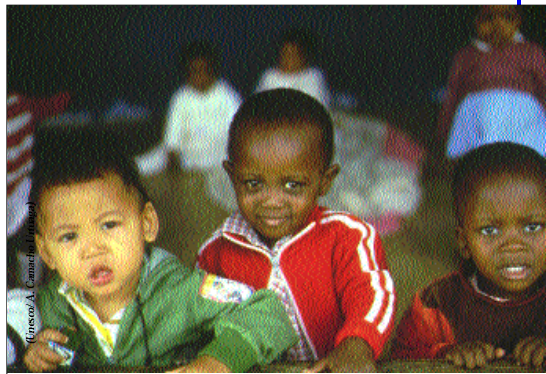
He said the NGOs would speak out on behalf of African youth whose future will be the focus of the forum.

EDUCATION FORUM : Have NGOs ever been so directly involved in the process of elaborating a global consensus and what role would they play at the Dakar forum?

Raphael Ndiaye : First of all, we should congratulate ourselves for the progress we have made since Jomtien, ten years ago. Today, thanks to their experience, most countries, especially African countries, have recognized that education is a sector that the public authorities cannot and should not handle alone. Therefore, they enlisted the support of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the civil society to form an effective and lasting partnership in the pursuit of the goals of education for all.

We witnessed one of the most striking examples of this partnership in Bamako, Mali, in November-December 1997, during the workshop on 'Innovative Experiences in Basic Education'. During the proceedings we raised the need to involve NGOs and civil society in education efforts so that we can meet the enormous challenges facing the sector in the coming years.

Education is so important that we cannot leave the public authorities, to take sole responsibility for the sector. Thus, our participation in the Dakar forum will be the



Eight years is already late. Education starts in early childhood

Providing girls with equal access to education remains a challenge in many countries. I knew a father who eagerly sent his 6-year-old son to school, but prevented his 10-year-old daughter from ever seeing the inside of a classroom.

This episode illustrates the discrimination girls face in many developing countries when it comes to access to educational opportunities. Sixty percent of the 100 million children who are not in school in developing countries are girls. Girls are systematically more disadvantaged than boys solely because of their gender.

The situation is most disturbing in countries in Africa and South Asia. A six-year-old girl in South Asia, for example, will spend an average of six years in school -- three years less than a boy of same age. The situation of girls become even worse when rural-urban disparities come into play : a girl who lives in rural a community is three times more likely to drop out of school than a boy in the area.

In Africa, the ravages of war, the enormous human losses associated with the HIV/AIDS epidemic and crippling foreign debt all have a direct impact on the ability of countries to meet their education goals. Today, some 42 million children of primary school age are out of school in sub-Saharan Africa. Despite these challenges, some countries have made progress. Cape Verde, Malawi, Mauritius, South Africa and Zimbabwe have already achieved primary enrolment rates of 90 percent or more. Similarly, at least 17 million more African children attend school today compared to

continued on page 3

crowning achievement of our long years of battle to be heard on all vital issues affecting the population.

For example, at the Rio de Janeiro summit (Brazil) in 1992, there was no dialogue between the governments and the NGOs present at the Earth summit. The two groups even held their meetings in different parts of town. We dare hope that this sort of situation will never occur again.

Do NGOs have a special message to deliver at this Forum ?

R. Nd. : We wanted NGOs to be well represented at the Forum.

Instead, about sixty NGOs from around the world will be represented by some 300 delegates. This is very small in relation to the 1,000 participants expected to be present. However, they will do their best to make their points of view heard and try to make some contributions to the great decisions the meeting will take for the future.

At any rate, you may rest assured that NGOs will participate in the development, design, definition and implementation strategy of the forum's emergency and follow-up measures.

What kinds of obstacles have NGOs encountered with states, institutions and organizations in the pursuit of Education for All?

R. Nd. : We have faced many problems, although our demand was the issue of NGO legitimacy. Civil society was also fighting for recognition from the public authorities. They sought status as a partner in the design and development of certain decisions governing the education sector.

Our struggle was long and difficult in some countries. We demanded pluralism. Thus, it is no longer possible today for one person to speak in everyone's name.

Continued on page 2

Interview with Svein Osttveit Executive Secretary of the World Education Forum



'The governments cannot and should not do it all alone'

Page 2