

Eighth Meeting of the High Level Group on Education for All

16-18 December 2008

Oslo, Norway

OSLO DECLARATION

“ACTING TOGETHER”

1. We, Ministers, leading officials of multilateral and bilateral agencies, and senior representatives of civil society and private sector organisations, gathered at the invitation of the Director-General of UNESCO and of the Minister of Environment and International Development of Norway, in Oslo from 16 to 17 December, for the 8th Education for All (EFA) High Level Group Meeting. We are deeply grateful for the warm hospitality offered by the Norwegian government.
2. This Eighth High Level Group meeting takes place in the context of a global economic slowdown spurred by a financial crisis unprecedented since the 1930s. This crisis will have a disproportionate impact on the poor – those who carry the least responsibility for these events. It should not serve as justification for any reduction in national spending and international aid to education. Instead, steadfast support for achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the EFA and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), is more vital than it was before the crisis. It will also be imperative to protect and insulate the world’s poorest children, youth and adults from the worst effects of the crisis.

Reaffirming the centrality of education for development

3. In this context, we reaffirm that education is a fundamental human right, to be respected at all times. It is one of the most effective tools for achieving inclusive and sustainable economic growth and recovery, reducing poverty, hunger and child labour, improving health, incomes and livelihoods, for promoting peace and environmental awareness. Education empowers individuals with the knowledge, values and skills they need to make choices and shape their future. Universal access to quality basic education and better learning outcomes are the drivers to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. As reaffirmed at the September 2008 United Nations MDGs summit, sustained investment in education and health is essential for reaching the MDGs.
4. *We therefore agree to better plan and coordinate global advocacy efforts for all six EFA goals. We task the EFA convening agencies and interested EFA partners to further develop a joint EFA advocacy plan of action and present its first results to the next meeting. We shall, for that purpose, welcome and work with all existing initiatives, including the broad alliance of the “Class of 2015”.*
5. Educational strategies need to be integrated within broader anti-poverty and national development policy frameworks. The fact that child malnutrition and ill health remain a major obstacle to educational access and achievement for the poor highlights the intricate connections among education, health and social conditions. It underscores the need for stronger inter-sectoral policy coordination.
6. *We accordingly request the EFA convening agencies, to engage with relevant UN agencies such as the WHO and the WFP as well as interested EFA partners in order to better coordinate education, health and nutrition initiatives in integrated programmes, targeting young children in poor communities in countries far from EFA. We commit to support such initiatives that should be country driven and backed by development partners.*

Making equity a priority in education: why governance matters

7. Since the World Education Forum in 2000, many countries, including some of the poorest, have taken bold and courageous actions, often supported by the development partners, to

improve access to education. However, on present trends, 29 million children will still have no access to primary schooling in 2015. We subscribe to the conclusion of the International Conference on Education held in November 2008 in Geneva that inclusive quality education is fundamental to achieving human, social and economic development. Policies must therefore focus on reducing disparities based on gender, wealth, rural/urban and other differences. To achieve greater equity, national governments and their partners must expand early childhood care and basic education; ensure affordable learning opportunities at post-primary levels and address adult literacy needs.

8. Gender disparities are still deeply entrenched in many countries and affect both boys and girls. They are often magnified by poverty and other forms of social disadvantage. Girls and women are disproportionately affected by malnutrition, health hazards and by gender-based violence including sexual harassment. Girls are especially disadvantaged in countries experiencing conditions of fragility and during emergencies. Special measures are required to reach them and to promote an enabling learning environment.
9. Improving learning outcomes for all students is an imperative. To this end interested national governments must be supported to develop indicators and contextualized instruments and standards of quality for assessment and monitoring and invest in quality inputs and processes.
10. Governance reforms in favour of decentralization and the introduction of greater choice and competition in educational provision must carry appropriate safeguards against possible inequitable effects on the poor and excluded.
11. Capacity concerns are acute in countries experiencing conditions of fragility. In such circumstances the development of individual, organizational and institutional capacities is of utmost importance for strengthening weak government structures and state legitimacy. Development partners should use more flexible, timely and innovative mechanisms such as the proposed EFA Fast Track Initiative (FTI) “Education Transition Fund” to respond to high-risk situations, in line with country-led approaches.
12. *We call upon EFA partners to support national commitments to educational equity, both with regards to access, attendance and to learning processes and outcomes. This should include the development of well-defined and gender sensitive targets to measure equity, as well as indicators and monitoring tools to this end. Joint knowledge and data sharing on equity in education should be supported by the EFA partners, led by the convening agencies, to help ensure capacity building and improved policy development, planning and implementation.*

Increasing financing and targeting the most in need

13. In a majority of countries, progress towards EFA since 2000 has benefited from a commendable effort to increase both national public funding and aid to basic education. However the recent stagnation in aid commitments and the cut in the share of national income devoted to education in some countries are causes for serious concern. The global economic slowdown could aggravate this trend. If development partners were simply to fulfil their previous pledges, it would lead to a sharp increase in financing for developing countries, which would in turn mitigate the impact of the global financial crisis.
14. National governments and development partners must increase financing of policies and programmes that promote the inclusion of all children and improve learning outcomes for all. To this end, fee-free primary schooling should be implemented as a basic right. In line with the Accra Agenda for Action’s call for aid effectiveness, national governments and development partners should allocate educational funding where it is most needed and ensure that it is more efficiently and effectively used. Development aid should be targeted at countries furthest from the EFA goals and in particular to those experiencing conditions of fragility or receiving limited external support. Furthermore, funds should reach the most disadvantaged groups within these countries. We accordingly take note of the December 2008 Statement from the High-Level Event on Financing Education in Conflict Affected Areas held in Doha, Qatar, calling for priority to be placed on providing and protecting education in these circumstances.

To target those in greatest need, existing financing mechanisms and other innovative approaches should be tapped drawing on civil society and the private sector.

15. *We urgently call on national governments to allocate adequate domestic resources (4-6% of GNP and 15-20% of public expenditure) to education, on development partners to increase official development assistance and on all EFA partners to prioritise investment in basic education within a balanced approach to the whole sector. We further urge the development partners to deliver on past commitments and ensure the timely flow of adequate resources through various bilateral and multilateral aid channels including FTI Trust Funds, through which they assist the most EFA challenged countries. In countries making progress towards EFA we call on governments and the development partners to better target those still excluded from education.*

Recruiting, training, deploying and retaining teachers

16. Without adequate numbers of professionally qualified teachers, including female teachers, who are deployed in the right places, well-remunerated and motivated, adequately supported, and proficient in local languages, we cannot offer the world's children quality education.
17. Globally 18 million new primary teachers will be needed in the next 7 years just to achieve universal primary education. National governments must strike a balance between the short-term need to get teachers into classrooms and the longer term goal of building up a high-quality professional teaching force. Addressing the teacher gap requires country driven long-term strategies and firm commitments. Policies must encompass attention to professional development opportunities, adequate employment and teaching conditions and greater participation of teachers in decision-making via social dialogue.
18. *We urge national governments, with appropriate technical support to map out their short and medium-term needs for recruitment, deployment, training and retention of teachers. We call upon development partners to support national efforts in this area, working with governments, regional bodies, civil society and teacher organizations, to identify and meet the needs specified, and provide predictable support to cover the associated costs.*
19. *We endorse the creation of an international Task Force on 'Teachers for EFA'; a voluntary global alliance of EFA partners working together to address the 'teacher gap'. We invite the Task Force to further develop the proposals contained in its Action Plan, based on the principles of national ownership, and to report to the next High-Level Group meeting. To that end, it shall explore the possibilities for South-South and North-South-South cooperation in relation to teachers, including the E-9 Bali declaration. Moreover, the Task Force shall focus particularly on those countries furthest away from reaching the EFA goals and those with the largest teacher gaps. We agree to set up a secretariat, supported by willing partners, to assist the Task Force.*

Next Meeting

20. We welcome the offer of the Government of Ethiopia and of the African Union to host the 9th High Level Group meeting on EFA to be held in Addis Ababa, in February 2010.