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EDUCATION FOR ACTION

ANOTHER SCHOOL DAY. ONCE AGAIN WAKNG BEFORE THE DAY break and marching to class through the moist cold of dawn with a bag of books attached to my back like a ball and chain. As my fingers ached from scribbling in my notebook the last thing on my mind was any thought on the privileges or benefits of education. But education extends further than merely math and science, language and literature. As Francis Keppel, a US Commissioner of Education, stated, «Education is too important to be left solely to educators.»

Images of classrooms, desks, books and rulers are invoked by the word: 'education.' But not all transfer of knowledge needs to be rigidly structured. As demonstrated in this issue, the positive effects of informal education should not be underestimated. However valuable the informal channels of education are, they are not an obvious alternative to well-thought out educational programmes. It is difficult to decide exact importance of education in development. When people are starving or dying it is hard to declare the importance of education. Nevertheless, without education it is difficult to break through the cycle and to penetrate to the root cause of the problem.

Regardless, leaving people to fester in their ignorance is not the solution. Ignorance is not the bliss that it is purported to be. Education can be the difference between life and death. There are cases where people diagnosed as HIV positive have had to move due to discrimination, some have even been burnt to death. People go untreated and continue to transmit the disease because they cannot recognize the symptoms or even because they fear the persecution they may face. This behavior may shock some of us, but then, we've most likely had some education on AIDS.

People in desperate situations can endanger the lives of others, but with guidance draw lessons and inspiration from others to channel the actions positively and peacefully. Where will they draw their inspiration from without an adequate education? They will draw it from what they *have* learned, they will draw it from the tragedy and desperation that surrounds them already. They remain under siege by their ignorance of an alternate method. As we advocate the distribution of knowledge we should always keep in the back of our minds what can be done with the knowledge. In the words of Herbert Spencer, «The great aim of education is not knowledge, but action.»

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IMPLEMENTING NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN THE SOUTH:
A CHANCE FOR PEOPLE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES TO REALISE THEIR OWN PROJECTS

A CONVERSATION WITH CAROLINE FIGUÈRES

SAHLAN MOMO

Caroline Figuères (Msc, National School for Water and Environmental Engineering (ENGEES), Strasbourg, France, 1985), from 1985 to 2002 has been working for a number of French and Dutch consulting companies, eventually moving to The Netherlands in 1989. Thanks to her involvement in short missions and projects in developing countries and in Europe, Ms Figuères gained an invaluable insight into international water and environmental problems. She has a broad experience in projects as advisor, including policy making, feasibility studies, project outlining and preparation, master planning, monitoring and evaluation, project development and financing, up to the strengthening of institutional capacity.

In 1996 Ms Figuères founded IWACO-France, the French branch of the Dutch IWACO consulting company, and till 1999 she developed its corporate strategy. From 1999 to 2002, she has been working at Netherlands Engineering Consultants (NEDECO) as marketing manager and water expert. In 1999 she was chosen to participate in the next round of a water leadership programme. From 2002 to 2007 Ms Figuères has been Head of the Urban Water and Sanitation Department at the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education (Delft, The Netherlands) and member of the management team. She has been involved in various education and capacity building programmes in water and environmental sectors. She has implemented workshops and trainings in several countries mostly in Africa and Asia. Currently, Ms Figuères is Managing Director of the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) based in The Hague, The Netherlands.

→| INTERVIEW

"The century is advanced, but every individual begins afresh."

J. W. GOETHE

The International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) is a non-profit foundation specialised in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a tool for development. IICD creates practical and sustainable solutions using both modern media (such as computers, internet, email and multimedia) and traditional media (such as radio and television) to connect people and enable them to benefit from ICT, thereby contributing to the Millenium Development Goals.Together with partners from the public, private and non-profit sector, IICD puts knowledge, innovation and finance to work. Currently, IICD is active in Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Ghana, Jamaica, Mali, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia in the sectors education, environment, governance, health and livelihoods (agriculture). We asked Ms Figuerès to give us an overview of the institution she manages, to illustrate its achievements in using ICT to enhance education through the several ICT projects and policy processes it supports, and to explain its overall role in the education sector.

How and when was IICD established?

IICD was created from scratch in 1996. Jan Pronk, at that time minister of Development and Cooperation for the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stressed the importance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for development, thus this NGO was set up. Although IICD is often seen as an international organisation, it is a Dutch based NGO.

What is the role of the IICD?

When setting a project in a country, we first establish a 'round table' with different stakeholders. We discuss with them their problems and objectives, and we suggest how ICT can facilitate the creation or the implementation of the relevant solutions. The next stage involves developing a pilot projects, after which the projects are is put into practice. We help local people with these projects and support the technology needed for them, either with high technology like internet and cellphones or more conventional communications tools, including radio and television.

Can you give us an example of the activities IICD in the educational sector?

A relevant example is the Lusaka Vocational Training project. In a rough township of Lusaka, in Zambia, we are supporting the Chawama Youth skill training centre, which carries out activities in the fields of tailoring, auto mechanics,

carpentry etc. The centre also runs a music recording studio for young music writers, who often play a combination of African music, rap and other styles. It is interesting that they frequently convey in the music their life stories, their problems and their experiences.

Have these activities an anthropological or sociological content?

Yes, but in reality the content itself is not the main purpose of the training centre. In the case of the music studio, it was the local youth who came up with the idea, and we said «why not». Our projects are focused on the people or the local organisations that are responsible for a certain activity. If these people inspire those around them, who in turn communicate the message to others, then the project will succeed, independently from its specific content. These people are 'agents of change' or entrepreneurs or carriers: individuals who see opportunities and are able to transform the ideas into action. With our projects we help the local people to do what *they* want. Instead of setting up our predetermined solutions, we assist them to formulate their own solutions, because they are the best agents who can apply them into their own, local context. The last thing we want is to transplant a foreign solution created in a different context.

Do you provide then the content of the ICT?

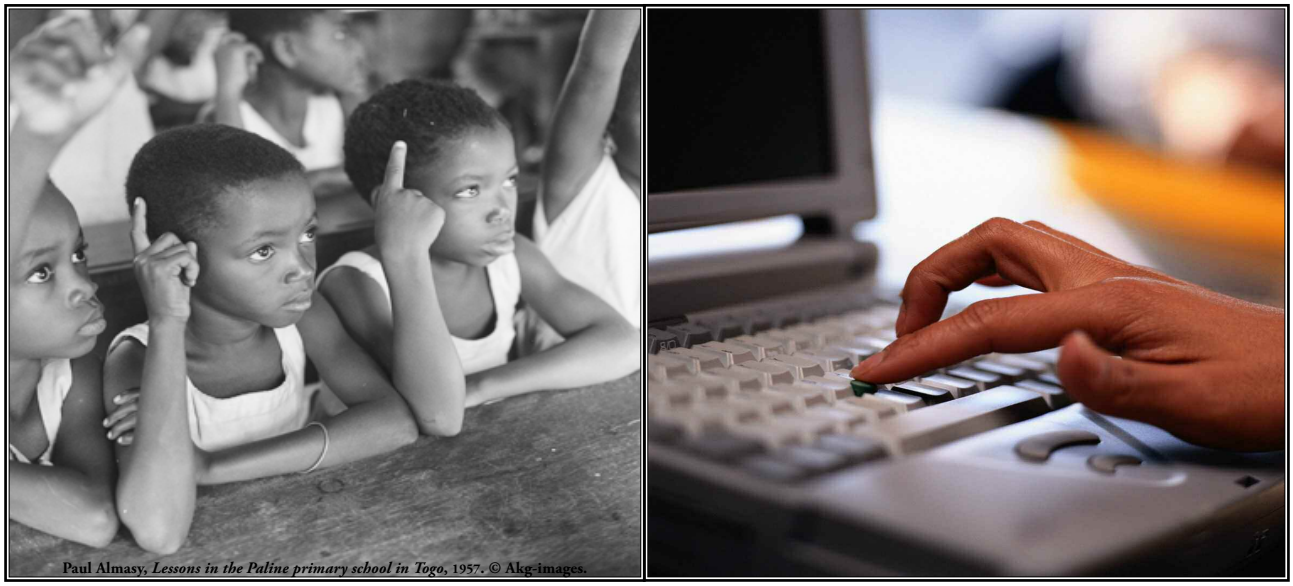
Yes, we provide the ICT support. We consider that the local communities know how to address a specific topic related challenge. We are not experts in health, education or agriculture, but we have sufficient knowledge to understand their challenges and to help them introduce the ICT to the solution or to the project that the local community has selected.

Are these projects established with the help of local partners?

Yes, nothing can be done without the help of local partners. We find a local organisation is owning the project, being able to take care of and to manage it, and then we help them carry it out, by financing the activities, giving advice, know-how and training. Once the project is established, we help them through mentoring via the organisation, which will continue even when IICD is no longer directly involved. If the project is working, we really seek to embed it. Currently, over 50% of the pilot projects have already been embedded in the day-by-day activities of the organisation. We prefer to be involved only at advisory or coaching level. The local people have to take the concrete decisions relating to the projects, and we allow them to make their own mistakes – for the parties involved this is really the best way to learn. Nevertheless, where a large amount of money is involved or the repercussions of a mistake could be significant, we support them with more than just advice. To date, we decided to terminate about 10% of the projects because they were not effective.

How does the relationship between your institution and the local partners work? Could you give us an example?

An example showing the importance of the dialogue between IICD and the local partners is the blood transfusion project in Zambia, which coordinates and manages the national blood transfusion programme. At the beginning, the local people proposed to develop their own software to create a database management system for blood donor tracking and data retention. Since the development of software is expensive, we first recommended looking for a suitable program already available on the market. They found a company which was implementing a similar project, but unfortunately the licensing system was too expensive, since the fees were based on the number of persons added to the databank. Consequently, we agreed to the option of developing the software in cooperation with the Open Source Zambia Developers Community. To date, our local partners are now concretely implementing the project, such as preparing the terms of reference for the databank etc. Again, we help them to consider and evaluate different possibilities for such implementation. In particular, they received from the USAID and the EU a great deal of equipment for blood testing. This ensures that the process of taking blood donations is in accordance with World Health Organisation (WHO) standards. The main problem still remains in recording the blood donation by hand, because one of the major difficulties in Zambia is finding donors who are not contaminated by HIV/Aids



Paul Almasy, *Lessons in the Paline primary school in Togo*, 1957. © Akg-images.

– trustee donors – and making their data easily accessible for future donations. It took around three months to see this aspect of the project going through, which although lengthy, is long enough for the involved parties to make up their minds and to stand behind their decisions.

Are the local partners trained by IICD?

Yes, when the people from this organisation and the stakeholders need training on a particular aspect, that training is provided either by another partner (training centre) or by IICD staff member if the competence is not yet available. In Zambia there is now a good training centre, almost grown up from nothing. We started by supporting an existing organisation which wanted to expand its activities in the field of ICT training. Additionally, we organize assistance from important companies in the Netherlands (such as Altran, Ordina, InterAccess, Atos Origin, Cap-Gemini) that can donate time to provide training in the country where the project is based.

It seems that the local partners play in intermediate role between you and the end-users. How sensitive is this aspect?

The relationship with our local partner is actually quite sensitive. We are aware that the information we have about the needs of local people often reflects the view of our *partners* and not always that of the end-users. There is therefore a risk that the balance between 'supply and demand' of services might fail if the demand comes only from the partners, or if the cooperation between the partner and end-users is not properly working. In some ICT projects where we train the partners, we require them also to train the end-users, and encourage the end-users to train in turn other people. Understandably, the partners are often reluctant to such divulgation of skills, because it limits their advantageous position in the business. However, since we have no option but to work with local partners, this problem needs to be addressed. We also thought of getting directly in contact with the end-users, and to bypass the intermediate level, by having our local representatives and our local offices. This would certainly bridge that gap, but may destroy the power of the network. These networks are indeed the best way to make information flow and reach the end-users. I believe that power lies in the ability of sharing knowledge, not in owning such knowledge exclusively, like many people still think, and the best way to discourage this hoarding of information is to reinforce the networks, through linking them with other actors, who are linked and interacting at a broader scale, such that they can share and generate knowledge openly.

In which ways is it possible to link these networks?

We try to be proactive and attuned to local events, to create links with other actors in the region and other organisations working on the specific topic and to integrate the knowledge held by IICD into the network. For instance, some of the information IICD has gained through a project in a country could be very useful in other countries. Moreover, into a network working on a specific topic, for instance health, we bring information relevant to that topic.At the moment, this process is still done in an unstructured manner, with people meeting each other on an *ad hoc* basis, and the link is structured only afterwards. In January 2008 we started a Thematic Learning Circle within the IICD related to specific topics; we have one circle on education, one on livelihoods, another on gender and so on. The people actively involved under each topic have the opportunity to gather and exchange information concerning their experiences, to learn from each other and to share information with other groups. The Learning Circle involves an open discussion about an action in a country, followed by analysing, evaluating and finally planning the new activities, therefore creating a type of 'think-tank'. We had noted, in fact, that the analysis was often shortcut by bilateral actors who intervened with their own suggestions. Through the Learning Circles project, instead, we can strengthen this process and have the analysis being done effectively, both on questions arisen within the project and the external questions, till the publication of the end results.

May these networks be compared to a living organism? And what would be the main dangers or 'diseases' which can occur?

In organisms, the different elements or parts work normally in symbiosis, since none of them has a separate interest independent from the interest of the whole organism. In networks, instead, there is at the beginning often a lack of mutual understanding between the members, and a lack of trust that everyone is working for the best of the network. The most important – and difficult – issue is to engage with those individuals who are working in isolation, and let them understand that they will be better off when working in collaboration with others or with a community. This change of approach requires a prior change of the individual(s).

Does the integration of ICT involve the entire community or only specific sectors?

Although in the past ICT was seen as a stand-alone sector, mainly independent from its application, we now follow a more integrated approach. If you want to have ICT work, it must be rooted in the sectors where it is applied, such as education, health, agriculture, governance etc. ICT need not to be implemented in every activity, but only in those where it provides an added value. In the health sector, for instance, Health (facility management) Information system or telemedicine can make a great difference. The main advantage of ICT is in making information and knowledge accessible to those who need it. This is in itself a major added value for the whole community, but the real impact is difficult to measure because of many variables occurring during the development of a project. The introduction of ICT helps the local people look at the processes in a different way and redefine the way in which they work. It is a power of ICT that goes beyond the mere technology, and involves the community at a deeper level. For instance, when applying ICT to transform a paper form into electronic form, the worker shall re-consider the way in which they phrase and structure the language to make it more effective.

Do you mean that applying ICT is a process of learning as well as an implementation of technology?

Yes. I find it fascinating how ICT facilitates this learning, even where general knowledge may not be present, and I have seen this learning occur in a number of circumstances. For example, we have a few of projects on health information systems. By applying ICT, the users recognized that there was an unnecessary chain of information travelling to and from

an excessive number of different people, rendering the whole communication process inefficient. In worst cases, it would take a year for some information to reach the Ministry. By adding a function of direct feedback to the centre, it was possible for local people to speed up the flow of information to the Ministry, and allowed a more effective preparation of the centre itself, with consequent financial improvements. This new ICT system has created a win-win situation, where information and feedback can easily flow, and changes are made available more quickly.

What are the main obstacles for the local communities in developing ICT projects?

Besides the technical issues (connectivity) and the financial issues, a big obstacle is the *lack of self-belief:* only a limited number of people are acquainted with the idea that they can carry out a project by themselves. Fortunately, the exposure to both local and global issues and developments plays an important role in fostering the mentality of self-reliance. In the five years I have been working at UNESCO-IHE I noted a considerable improvement: since the participants enrolled in 2006 had had a broader exposure to global events (e.g. surfing on internet) than those enrolled in 2000, they were much more critical of and inquisitive about global events and showed already a sense of self-reliance. This has a double benefit, because once there is a sense of self-reliance amongst some individuals (the agents of change, as mentioned before), they can in turn encourage others, and the mentality of self-belief can develop exponentially.

Are there differences in participation between males and females?

Some project had a significantly lower impact on the female group of end-users. This may depend on several factors, such as the community and the country in which the project is based, as well as the type of project at hand. One example is the agriculture project we had in Ghana, where we set up an internet connection with a farm cooperative in order to allow the on-line pricing of the market crops. After some time we noticed that the women lost interest in the project, since only the prices of the crops farmed by men were indicated on the board! Only when the cooperative began indicating also the price of crops farmed by women, the project regained a better balanced participation from the two groups.

Do you find similar problems with female participation in other sectors such as education?

In relation to education and schooling, participation amongst girls is low because the parents often prefer to send their male son(s) to school, if they have to make a choice. Even in primary education, the boys attending school often outnumber the girls. Moreover, girls are often expected to stay at home and help with domestic matters. The lack of female participation is even worse at the level of secondary education, because this is the age when, in certain communities, girls are expected to get married. And if the daughter is going to get married outside her family the investment on her is normally smaller than that on daughters who are going to marry inside the family, thereby supporting very strong 'tribal' relations. Because of this bias against female participation in education, one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals is to get all children, male and female alike, complete primary level education. Hopefully, the opportunities for girls in these situations will improve with a growing socio-educational level. In other areas, like in some Sub-Saharan African countries with high unemployment rates, the lack of schooling relate mainly to boys, who are expected to work and to earn income for the family.

In some countries, despite the education programmes, there is still little progress because of failures in implementation. What are the reasons for that?

In education the peculiar issue is convincing the parents to send their children to school, that poses them the choice between a short-term value of keeping the children at home and the long-term added value of education. The 2008 Education-for-All Global Monitoring Report, and the intermediate results for education and health, indicates that there is still an alarming amount of progress to be made in that direction.

What is the impact of ICT in education? Which benefits can be expected by implementing ICT?

Speaking from my own experience, I have witnessed changes on a case by case basis, especially in the social behaviour of students. In Zambia, a teacher introduced multimedia in a secondary school for girls during biology lessons focused on mosquitoes and malaria. The behaviour of the class was impressively quite and disciplined, with students asking questions only upon permission; that reminded me the vision of a European class in 1950's. By having ICT and multimedia, and consequently being exposed to global events, both the teachers' and students' behaviour evolve. They both become more critical and more proactive; this change is something we wish to see globally, in all people, in order to move in the direction of a better democracy. Another example is the Chawama Youth project in Zambia mentioned before, where participants make their own music. We partnered with Atos Origin who provided a one-week training and helped the project leaders to develop the training material. In the evenings, their young participants were taught to make videos reflecting their interests, and now these youth have created real video clips. This demonstrates that ICT can be implemented in short time and that participants can pick up new ICT skills quite easily and quickly. In addition to that, students educated with the assistance of ICT have a better chance of finding employment because they have ICT skills – at the moment ICT makes a significant difference.

How are your projects monitored?

The monitoring is based on surveys. We prepare a questionnaire survey for our partners, and in some cases NGO's, to answer. This could be done online. Then we look back and reflect on the project and develop lessons learned. For instance, with the ICT for Education we collected in a booklet the lessons learnt from the project itself. We have done the same for livelihood. Based on numerous projects we are able to extract from our experiences more general knowledge and, as a consequence, we can improve the assistance we provide.

What are your institution's future aims and objectives?

This year the major goal is to detail the strategy for the coming years since our agreement with the Dutch government is to be renewed in 2010. After nearly twelve years of activities, IICD has become mature and is entering a new development phase. This offers the chance to reflect on how we want to continue doing and funding development cooperation. I see two different approaches in this sector: a progressive 'bottom-up' approach that really involves the people at a grassroots level and the old-fashioned 'top-down' approach, with the patriarchal attitude of the 'rescuers' of the poor, local people. While for a big 'old' organisation it is difficult to move from a top-down attitude to a bottom-up approach, for a small and rather young organisation like IICD that always worked this way, it is much easier. It allows also to stay at the forefront of change. I wish to see more organisations adopting this progressive approach, which is not yet very visible, and I would like to demonstrate that IICD is working for a change in this direction. To that scope, IICD needs to enhance the structural linkage between the North and the South and between the South and the experience. We now have a lot of networks working successfully in the different countries, as mentioned before, and the overall objective is to link these networks to each other, and then to develop a more structured linkage to the North. Strengthening IICD's networks is the direction we are moving in for the future.

What are the other main points in the IICD strategy?

The second element of the strategy is to really focus on innovation, not only in technological sense but also on the process. A major point is the ability of IICD, with the help of its local partners, to put adequate technology into a local context. In some areas of Africa, for example, the connectivity is so low that certain forms of technology cannot be used, and we have to find solutions to make a particular system work at acceptable level of quality and that people can pay for it. Integrating ICT to local needs is an essential skill of IICD and its partners. I would like us to continue being cutting edge at a level that makes us unique. The third and final element of our strategy is to find a good balance between the funds coming in, with their qualified allocations, and the expectations of the people we are assisting. Because of our involvement on the field, we note that the needs of local people do not always match with the conditions specified for the funds.

What is the expected time frame for implementing the new strategy?

The new strategy has to be ready by 2010, when we will have to apply for new funding from the Ministry. By the end of 2008 we shall have defined our strategy so that we can check during 2009 how the strategy fits the Ministry's expectations and requests, and submit the final proposals in 2010. Despite the long time frame, there is still pressure on this process, because we need feedback from the local people. Note that the four-year strategy, only indicates the proposed activities, the country and sector of intervention. It is a general framework which leaves us the freedom to work in a demand driven manner. The particular details of the activities are not finalised in the beginning, but are defined, and reviewed and agreed annually depending on the particularities of each project. At the end of each year we evaluate the success of the projects according to the annual plan, and we adopt the necessary changes or corrections. Since we mainly work with what our local partners are willing to do, our plans contain our *expectations* qualified by what our partners are able and willing to do.

What is the relationship you have with your donors, in particular regarding the conditions they pose on the grants?

Most of the funding comes from the Dutch government, and of course IICD has to report that the money has been correctly and efficiently spent. A big question remains on how the government's approach to development cooperation may change in the coming future, because of some critics raised to a few organisations about the correct expenditure of the funds. In fact, when money is just given to people, thrown at a problem, they will spend it uncontrollably, with even the risk of corruption, and there is little confidence that the money is being applied properly. Nonetheless, it would be regrettable to cut all funding because of few critical situations. Instead the solution is to give help in a more interactive, selective manner. Instead of giving money along with conditions for the grant, nowadays some donors are willing to give the money directly to third local NGO's parties who then tell the international NGO how this money should be spent. The idea in behind is that it is more demand driven. The question is if the local NGO is really representative of the target group or its own interest!; this process has been adopted by a number of large NGO's. What local NGO's still need along with the grants is also support – this is mainly a problem of a lack of local capacity. IICD has put the transparency as a fundamental issue of all its actions. If we have the feeling that for any reason something is not going well, then we ask for an external audit to ensure that our projects are not subject to any misuse of funds.

Do you also operate in Western or developed countries?

We are not involved in developed countries in terms of operating projects. However, we are part of a structured network of contacts among numerous organisations. With some of them we have a partnership, from which our local partners in the developing countries can benefit. For instance, we partner with private companies that can be involved in the local projects. Such mutual benefit works also on the other way: we partner with other organisations which established projects in developing countries, e.g. Cordaid and Hivos, and then they can act as a vehicle for promoting the work of IICD is bringing, for instance, the ICT knowledge and/or the way of working. ▣

THE STATE OF THE MATTER

CAROLINE VERMIJ

EDUCATION HAS AN UNDENIABLE IMPORTANCE FOR ANY NATION. It is not only a basic human right (included in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent treaties, enshrined in legislation by governments that ratify them) but also a fundamental issue in the struggle for human dignity and freedom. Education for children is a way out of poverty and helps develop their potential. Achieving universal primary education by 2015 is one of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) and fighting illiteracy is the objective of UNESCO's Education For All (EFA)[1]. Of the 77 million children who do not attend school, 38 million are in Sub-Saharan Africa (2008 figures). One out of five adults worldwide has no basic literacy skill. Special measures are needed to reach the poorest, the most vulnerable and the most disadvantaged social groups.

→ I OVERVIEW

"The most certain way to hide form others the limits of our knowledge is not to go beyond them."

GIACOMO LEOPARDI

During the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, held in April 2000, 164 governments affirmed the importance of learning at all ages. Every year the EFA Global Monitoring Report Team issues a report with an analysis of the progress made and recommendations for improvements[2]. The 2008 report highlights the global trends concerning education. One of them is the rise of the so-called knowledge economy, because a more knowledge-intensive world economy inevitably requires more skilled labour. Quality primary education and high-level secondary education, both promoting problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, are thus essential for development.

Due to the abolition of school tuition fees in several countries, the number of children entering primary school has fortunately grown. Access to primary education is increasing but is still far from being universally spread. In 2005, 688 million children worldwide were enrolled in primary school, which is 6.4% more than in 1999. After the World Education Forum in Dakar enrolment improved significantly in sub-Saharan Africa (increasing by 29 million or 36%) and South and West Asia (35 million, 22%), while in the Arab States it continued at almost the same pace prior to Dakar. India, Nigeria and Pakistan together account for 27% of the children worldwide who do not go to school.

Overall, children are more likely to be left out of school if they come from poor households, live in rural areas and/or have a mother without schooling. For girls the probability of not being in school is even higher.

Also the quality of the education will need to be assessed, and all countries face the challenge of improving it. When children lack trained teachers, proper learning materials, instructional time and adequate schooling facilities, then they are unlikely to master the basics. Several governments are carrying out national education assessments, which often highlight the inequalities in learning outcomes within countries. Moreover, they generally show a relationship between a higher socio-economical status (parents' education, job, household wealth) and better student's achievements. In countries where data is available, we can see that rural children score lower than urban ones in language and mathematics.

In order to address the lack of teachers, alternatives are being sought, such as the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as an emerging tool for learning. For instance, India has launched EDUSAT, the world's first satellite dedicated to education, adapted for rolling out long distance learning programmes to schools, colleges, teacher-training institutions and non-formal education centres. Older technologies continue to play an important role: radio and television have helped expand access to secondary schooling in Brazil, India and Mexico.

According to the 2008 report some real progress has been observed especially in the number of children entering primary school. Many governments have taken measures to reduce the cost of schooling and tackle obstacles to education for girls. Nevertheless great challenges still remain. Firstly, there is a dramatic lack of schools, teachers and learning materials (across the world more than 18

million new teachers will need to be employed by 2015). Furthermore, poverty and social disadvantage remain major barriers for millions of children and young students. The existing policies aimed to improve both access to and quality of education are often not effective, since they would require much bolder actions, from an early age, to reach the most vulnerable groups and to dramatically expand literacy programmes among youth and adults. Aid for education must also be stepped up in line with promises donors made in 2000.

On 25 January 2008 during the World Economic Forum[3] held in Davos, Switzerland, the Global Education Alliance (GEA)[4] announced the start of a pilot project in the Republic of Rwanda and initiated a collaboration between corporations, the national government and foundations to achieve «education for all» in Rwanda. It will benefit from the successful experience of the Global Education Initiative[5] in Jordan (2003), in the Indian state of Rajasthan (2004) and in Egypt (2006). Rwanda has been chosen as a pilot country because of its track record of effective public-private partnerships and for the emphasis given by the government on the development of human capital, science and technology. AMD, Cisco, Edelman, Intel and Microsoft, among other partners, have expressed their wish to explore effective ways to help the government of Rwanda to achieve priorities in education. The companies involved will bring knowledge, skills and resources necessary to put children into school and will do so in the form of a partnership, with the national government and local donors.

However, not all schooling is initiated by the governments. In a study by James Tooley[6] it is shown that private schools exist in slums in India. Despite the official denial of private education for the poor, Tooley found large numbers of informal self-organised schools. He has supervised research on private schools in India, China and sub-Saharan Africa, finding that «the poor have remarkably innovative ways of helping each other» educationally, and even in the most destitute places on Earth they have nurtured a large and growing network of private schools for themselves. And contrary to common belief, the quality of these private schools is not worse than that of public schools. Although private schools employ untrained teachers who are paid much less than their government counterparts, and their facilities are grossly inadequate, the education is of good quality. Tooley's research concludes that private schools serving low-income families are not inferior to those provided by the state. Children from private schools outperform similar students from government schools in several key subjects. And this is true even for the unrecognized schools, which are normally dismissed by experts as being of poor quality. Consequently a genuine improvement in education could result from investments in private schools, such as offering loans for improving the school infrastructure or providing a worthwhile teacher training system. This appears as a very good alternative to public school, which may finally help even more poor children to gain access to education.

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[1] Education for All.

[2] EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, www.efareport.unesco.org

[3] The World Economic Forum is an independent international organization committed to improving the state of the world by engaging leaders in partnerships to shape global, regional and industry agendas. Incorporated as a foundation in 1971, and based in Geneva, Switzerland, the World Economic Forum is impartial and not-for-profit. It is tied to no political, partisan or national interests. www.weforum.org/annual meeting

[4] Global Education Alliance.

[5] Global Education Initiative.

[6] James Tooley, professor of education policy, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, England, in «Private Schools for the Poor – Education where no one expects it», in *Education Next*, fall 2005, vol. 5, no. 4. ▣

THE EDUCATION FOR ALL PROGRAMME

EDUCATION IS A KEY PARAMETER OF SUSTAINABLE HUMAN development and is essential for achieving international development targets. Development entails change of a societal and individual nature – education and learning of all kinds are key tools in enabling that change to take place, leading to new possibilities, new horizons and new connections. Education is also a fundamental human right and offers the hope that we can fulfil our potential as human beings.

The vision of Education for All (EFA) is to offer to everyone a basic education of quality, enabling children, youth and adults to grasp new opportunities, become more active citizens, and to initiate, manage and sustain positive change. International development targets, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), provide an essential development agenda with which the EFA goals have mutually reinforcing linkages. EFA and the MDGs have the same timeline – 2015 – and both aim to enhance international cooperation in support of the development plans of national governments.

ON FOCUS

"Education does not consist merely in adorning the memory and enlightening the understanding. Its main business should be to direct the will."

JOSEPH JOUBERT

The current Education for All (EFA) movement started in 1990 with a World Conference on Education in Jomtien, involving representatives from Governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies and Civil Society Organizations. The conference was convened by five multilateral agencies of the UN system – the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and World Bank). The resulting Jomtien Declaration on EFA entailed a commitment by countries and development partners to achieving universal primary education by 2000. Despite some good progress this goal proved to be unrealistic for many countries in the time period proposed. The five convening partners organized a follow-up World Education Forum in Dakar in April 2000, at which progress was reviewed, the EFA vision was renewed and an integrated set of six EFA goals was agreed by the participating countries and agencies/organisations.

These six Dakar goals represent the most comprehensive and ambitious education goals the international community has ever agreed to pursue. In terms of broader development efforts, the Millennium Declaration and the related MDGs, agreed by Heads of Governments and agencies at the United Nations Millennium summit in September 2000, provide an over-arching international framework. The MDGs include two of the six Dakar goals, namely achieving universal primary education by 2015 and gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005. Progress in EFA has therefore become increasingly intertwined with efforts to achieve the MDGs. This approach more clearly highlights the contribution of education to overall development and reiterates the rationale for investing in education, both as a key driver of development and as a basic human right. Achieving all six EFA goals will play a significant part in reducing poverty and realising the whole of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) agenda.

THE EFA GOALS

1 - Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;

2 - Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;

3 - Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;

4 - Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;

5 - Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality

in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;

6 - Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

EDUCATION-RELATED MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS WITH RELATED TARGETS

GOAL 2. ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

Target 3: Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling

6 - Net Enrolment Ratio in Primary Education (UNESCO).

7 - Proportion of Pupils Starting Grade 1 who Reach Grade 5 (UNESCO).

8 - Literacy Rate of 15-24 year-olds (UNESCO).

GOAL 3. PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER WOMEN

Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.

9 - Ratio of Girls to Boys in Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Education (UNESCO).

10 - Ratio of Literate Women to Men 15-24 years old (UNESCO).

11 - Share of Women in Wage Employment in the Non-Agricultural Sector (ILO).

12 - Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (IPU).

Since Dakar, the world has witnessed steady progress towards achieving the EFA goals, in particular towards universal primary education and gender parity among the lower-income countries. Nevertheless, progress towards the EFA goals has not been sufficient and fast enough to meet the target dates, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, and the Arab States. The gender parity goal for 2005 has already been missed, and over 80 countries are at risk of not achieving gender parity even by 2015. About one-fifth of the world's adult population – an estimated 781 million – remains illiterate. Quality at primary level remains a major issue worldwide, compounded by a serious shortage of trained and qualified teachers, particularly female teachers.

In response, the international community has made concerted efforts by providing technical and financial support to countries in need. In terms of financial support, there was a declining trend in Official Development Assistance (ODA) to education in the 1990s, but the year 2005 saw a positive projection of increased financial aid. While aid to basic education will likely increase in line with overall aid, its share would have to double to reach the estimated US$ 7 billion a year necessary just to achieve UPE and gender parity.

The reform of the UN system also provides a positive arena for this Plan, which, like the current reform efforts, aims at greater coherence and effectiveness among agencies, while at the same time providing a sectoral framework for implementing the principles of the reform. A similar, mutually reinforcing relationship exists with the aims of the Paris Declaration of Aid Effectiveness and Donor Harmonisation.

In countries where much remains to be accomplished, stronger political will is now visible. In support of this, it is urgent, eight years after the first commitment to the six EFA goals, to infuse new energy into the movement and to ensure that the seven remaining years before 2015 see concerted and complementary efforts. This requires the full engagement of all EFA stakeholders and particularly of the five convening agencies; a clear understanding of their relative roles responsibilities is essential. To respond to this need the Global Action Plan has been launched, building on each agency's comparative advantage and harmonising actions in support of country-led national education sector plans to achieve the EFA goals by 2015.

✓ INFO SOURCE: «EFA Global Action Plan.»

GLOBAL ACTION PLAN MONITORING REPORT 2008

The report conveys the principal developments and achievements since Dakar of the EFA six goals.

1 ~ EXPANDING AND IMPROVING EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

Early childhood care and education programmes improve children's health, nutrition, well-being and cognitive development. They offset disadvantage and inequality and lead to better achievement in primary school. The comprehensive care and education of children below age 3 remains a neglected area. Although child mortality rates have dropped, a majority of countries are not taking the necessary policy measures to provide care and education to children below age 3.

The provision of pre-primary education for children aged 3 and above has improved but remains scarce across sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States. Early childhood care and education programmes generally do not reach the poorest and most disadvantaged children, who stand to gain the most from them in terms of health, nutrition and cognitive development.

2 ~ ENSURING ACCESS TO FREE AND COMPULSORY PRIMARY EDUCATION

Access to and participation in primary education have sharply increased since Dakar, and the number of out-of-school children dropped from 96 million to 72 million between 1999 and 2005.

Twenty-three countries that lacked legal provisions for compulsory education in 2000 have since established

them. Compulsory education laws now exist in 95% of 203 countries and territories.

The global net enrolment ratio rose from 83% to 87% between 1999 and 2005, faster than from 1991 to 1999. Participation levels increased most rapidly in sub-Saharan Africa (23%), and South and West Asia (11%). The number of out-of-school children dropped by 24 million to 72 million between 1999 and 2005. Thirty-five fragile states account for 37% of all out-of-school children.

Despite overall enrolment increases, subnational disparities in school participation persist between regions, provinces or states and between urban and rural areas. Children from poor, indigenous and disabled populations are also at a systematic disadvantage, as are those living in slums. On current trends, 58 out of 86 countries that have not yet reached universal primary enrolment will not achieve it by 2015.

3 ~ Ensuring the learning needs of young people and adults

This goal has been particularly neglected, in part because of the difficulty of defining, documenting and monitoring it. Many young people and adults acquire skills through informal means, or through a great variety of non-formal literacy, equivalency, life-skills and livelihood programmes.

Household surveys show that non-formal education is the main route to learning for many disadvantaged youth and adults in some of the world's poorest countries. Yet non-formal education programmes remain neglected in terms of public funding, although some governments have recently developed national frameworks for sustained provision.

4 ~ Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in adult literacy

Adult literacy remains a serious global issue. Worldwide, 774 million adults still lack basic literacy skills. Some 64% of them are women, a share virtually unchanged since the early 1990s. Three regions (East Asia, South and West Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa) concentrate the vast majority of the one in five adults around the world still denied the right to literacy. Except in China, there has been little progress during the past decade in reducing the large number of illiterate adults.

The adult literacy rate in developing countries increased from 68% to 77% between the periods 1985–1994 and 1995–2004. Of the 101 countries still far from achieving 'universal literacy', 72 will not succeed in halving their adult illiteracy rates by 2015.

5 ~ Eliminating gender disparities

Only 59 countries with data had achieved gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005; 75% of countries with data are at parity or close to it at primary level, while 47% are close to reaching the goal in secondary education. Boys' underparticipation and underachievement are of growing concern in secondary education.

Only 18 out of 113 countries that missed the gender parity goal at primary and secondary level in 2005 stand a chance of achieving it by 2015. Gender equality remains elusive: sexual violence, insecure school environments and inadequate sanitation disproportionately affect girls' self-esteem, participation and retention. Textbooks, curricula and teacher attitudes continue to reinforce stereotypes on gender roles in society.

6 ~ Improving the quality of education

Survival rates to the last grade of primary school improved between 1999 and 2004 in most countries with data but remained low in sub-Saharan Africa (median rate of 63%) and in South and West Asia (79%). Relatively low and unequal learning achievement in language and mathematics characterize many countries worldwide.

Crowded and dilapidated classrooms, too few textbooks and insufficient instructional time are widespread in many developing countries and fragile states. Pupil/teacher ratios have increased in sub-Saharan Africa and in South and West Asia since 1999. Eighteen million new primary school teachers are needed worldwide to reach universal primary education by 2015.

Many governments are hiring contract teachers to save costs and rapidly increase the teaching force, but where such teachers lack adequate training and service conditions, this practice could have a negative impact on quality in the future. ▣

✓ INFO SOURCE: «EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008.»

Considerate la vostra semenza:
Fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
ma a seguir virtute e conoscenza.

§

Consider your origin:
you were not made to live as brutes,
but to pursue virtue and knowledge.

DANTE ALIGHIERI, *La Divina Commedia,* Inferno, xxvi: 118-120.
[English translation: Charles S. Singleton, Princeton, Bollingen, 1989, p. 279.]

TOWARDS UNIVERSAL EDUCATION WORLDWIDE:

MAJOR CHALLANGES AND STRENGHTS

LEBO MOFOLO

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN FOSTERING AND PROMOTING development, both at individual and at social level, has been recognised over the centuries by most civilisations around the world, and education is today declared as a fundamental human right. Nevertheless, the access to education – either through formal or informal channels – is still far from reality for millions of people worldwide. One of the UN Millennium Development Goals is indeed the achievement of universal primary education by 2015. All parties involved in accomplishing that goal – nations, politicians, local communities and NGOs – are facing multiple and complex challenges, particularly in the way they relate to each other and to the individuals concerned. It is thus essential that the means used to address these challenges be not simply effective, but also relevant and sustainable.

→| DISCUSSION

“ Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. ”

NELSON MANDELA

Informal education is the primary channel of instruction in Africa[1] and in most of the regions on which the UN's Education for All (EFA) programme is focused. Although its peculiarities may vary from country to country, or even among local communities, informal education has been generally recognized as a means for involving all sectors of a society in the endeavour towards universal education. A remarkable example in Africa is the Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) programme *Building Capacities for Non-Formal Education and Life Skills*[2], instituted in April 2004 with financial and technical assistance from UNESCO Section for Literacy and non-Formal Education 2004-'05 and the participation of the Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, along with Makerere University. The scheme provides troubled youth with the opportunity to receive practical training from an expert artisan over a period of three months and also includes an HIV/Aids prevention message to all trainees. Training activities comprise hairdressing, tailoring, motor vehicles mechanics, carpentry, welding and electronics, and always provide an activity-related 'toolkit' to each child.

Although most of the teacher-artisans do not generally have a post-primary education, as many as 288 participants have been placed since 2004 in valuable professional situations, and the majority of them are now working. Another project in the region is the Lusaka Vocational Training *Chawama Youth* in Zambia.

Vocational schemes like these are essential to ensure that education can reach even the most marginalised children, particularly those having no or little access to formal education. Moreover, such methods of instruction are relevant to and in line with the traditional local notion of education. Micheal Omolewa notes that «the traditional African education is structured in a way to ensure that every person can develop a set of skills. In the process, provisions are made for learning and training centres which gradually introduce the apprentice into the craft and skill of the chosen profession[3].»

As evidenced and emphasised in recent years, a means of improving the success rates of such programmes is the involvement and the active participation of stakeholders and end-users. Nancy Kendall identifies two main success factors in relation to said participation: the 'democratisation' of educational development programmes with their more transparent mechanisms, and the greater effectiveness of a project, in terms of management and planning, when it is owned by stakeholders[4].

The work of the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) reflects this very trend, whereby regional projects are first developed using a 'round table' system involving stakeholders, in addition to the support of local partners for implementing the programmes and encouraging the involvement of end-users. Since parents are often the primary determinants in the choice of sending a child to school, excluding them from the process of implementing or planning an educational programme would radically undermine its main goal.

An obstacle to universal education is the gender disparity in school enrolment. In the countries lacking universal

access to education, parents often prefer to send their son(s) to school, at either the primary, secondary or tertiary level of education, and to have their daughter(s) assist with the domestic duties or get married. The UNESCO report *Gender Parity in Education* (2008) states that «Globally, about 72 million children were out of school in 2005, with girls accounting for 57%». That data shows however consistent regional differences: in sub-Saharan Africa 54% of out-of-school children were girls, compared to South and West Asia with 66% and Arab States with 60%[5]. The gender unbalance appears even in contradiction with the output ranking: according to the Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2007, the enrolled girls not only perform like or outperform the boys, but also remain in education for a longer time, have higher graduation rates and lower repetition rates[6].

Another critical issue concerning the goal of universal primary education, and education policies in general, is the quality of the educational service, as opposed to the mere access to it. Daniel Sifuna notes a recent shift away from measuring educational goals exclusively in terms of access to education[7]. And regarding the question of how to define and to measure the quality, he clarifies that «common strands are now emerging in the way of assessing the quality levels, particularly referring to Inputs, Outputs and Process. Inputs concern the materials such as textbooks, desks, blackboards as well as teachers and students. The quality of these Inputs is often measured quantitatively or through status indicators, such as the degree of qualification of the teachers, the relevance of textbooks and the students' intellectual and nutritional status. Outputs include proxies of achievement (promotion and completion rates) and the measures of actual achievements, such as the type and the amount of learned facts, concepts and skills. Process refers to the proper organisation of the lessons, the correct use of texts and homework, the implementation of child-centred learning and the overall amount of time spent on a certain task»[8].

Teachers' training and qualification are therefore key factors to achieve universal primary education[9] and a higher education quality at global scale. Achieving and maintaining high teaching standards is a tough challenge for all countries, both for developed and for developing ones, although in the latter the conditions are much harder. Regarding the use of ICT in education, for example, the need to upgrade teachers' skills and standards is really global. In January 2008 UNESCO launched the ICT Competency Standards for Teachers. It defines in detail a «clear set of internationally recognized guidelines on what constitutes appropriate ICT skills and professional development for teachers» and aims at helping policy-makers and curriculum developers identify the ICT skills that teachers need[10].

The issue about training and recruitment procedures for teachers has been addressed with a variety of solutions stemming from different countries. In Kenya and Tanzania, in-service teacher training programmes have become increasingly popular for sourcing teachers[11]. However, some of the steps taken towards the improvement of the teaching standards overlooked the context and the particular circumstances, like, for instance, the different language used at school with respect to the mother tongue of both the students and the teachers. «With the help of external consultants, teacher guides have been worked out and teacher training courses have been given to have African teachers become more 'learner-centred', and to help them activate their students and engage them in critical thinking and dialogue. Teachers are asked to refrain from an academic approach where students just copy the notes from the blackboard, learn them by heart and repeat them at tests. However this might be the only possible teaching style when neither the teacher nor the students master the language of instruction»[12].

As a final remark regarding the mobility of students, UNESCO's *Comparing Education Statistics Across the World Report* found that Sub-Saharan Africa students have the highest

mobility worldwide, with «one out of 16 students (about 6%) from the region studying abroad. Central Asia (3.9%) and the Arab States (2.9%) follow»[13]. These are the regions where both the accessibility and the quality of education are particularly problematic, so that many students, when they can afford, prefer to attain their education abroad, generally in Western Europe and Northern America.

[9] Seventh Ministerial Review Meeting of the Nine High-Population Countries (also known as E-9 countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, and Pakistan). They represent half the world's population, but only half the teachers are trained in some countries and account for over two-thirds of the world's adult illiterates and more than half of out-of-school children. Ministers and education experts from the E-9 countries are meeting to strengthen their cooperation and focus on strategies to improve the number and qualifications of teachers.

[1] OMOLEWA, MICHAEL, «Traditional African Modes of Education: Their Relevance in the Modern World», in *International Review of Education* (2007) 53:593-612.

[2] Project Report: *Non-Formal Education and Livelihood Skills for Marginalised Street and Slum Youth in Uganda*, (June 2006), available on http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/28/03/39.pdf .

[3] *Ibid.* p. 596.

[4] KENDALL, NANCY, «Parental and Community Participation in Improving Educational Quality in Africa: Current Practices and Future Possibilities», in *International Review of Education* (2007) 53:701-708 (703-704).

[5] UNESCO Institute for Statistics, «Gender Parity in Education: Not There Yet», (March 2008) p. 1, available on http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev.php?ID=7191_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC .

[6] Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2007, «Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education», p. 45, available on http://www.unesco.org/education/GMR/2007/Full_report.pdf .

[7] SIFUNA, DANIEL, «The Challenge of Increasing Access and Improving Quality: An Analysis of Universal Primary Education in Kenya and Tanzania Since the 1970's», in *International Review of Education* (2007) 53:687–699 (689).

[8] *Ibid.* p. 690.

[10] UNESCO ICT Competency for Teachers: *Policy Framework, Competency Standards Modules and Implementation Guidelines*, available on http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=25740&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html .

[11] *Supra note* 7, p. 696.

[12] BROCK-UTNE, BRIGIT, «Language of Instruction and Student Performance: New Insights from Research in Tanzania and South Africa», in *International Review of Education* (2007) 53:509–530 (512).

[13] UNESCO Institute for Statistics «Global Education Digest 2006: Comparing Education Statistics Across the World», p. 37-48, available on http://www.uis.unesco.org/publications/GED2006 .

GIVING KNOWLEDGE FOR FREE

THE EMERGENCE OF OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

JAN HYLÉN

The 2007 report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) offers a comprehensive overview of the rapidly changing phenomenon of Open Educational Resources (OER) and the challenges it poses for higher education.

The project was led by OECD analyst Jan Hylén who is also the main author of the report. Francesc Pedró and Tom Schuller were closely involved in the design and execution of the project.

Jan Hylén holds a PhD in Political Science from Stockholm University, Sweden. He has worked in the National Agency for Education in Sweden among other things as Director of Research. He served as Political Advisor to the Minister of Schools and Adult Education and has acted as Executive Secretary for the Swedish Committee on the European Schoolnet, and Chairman in the Working Group for a New National ICT Strategy for Schools within the Ministry of Education and Science. He was a self-employed consultant for three years before he joined the OECD/CERI.

We are glad to offer here some extracts of the Report to our readers.

→| ALTERNATIVES

"If a little knowledge is dangerous, where is the man who has so much as to be out of danger?"

T.H. HUXLEY

An apparently extraordinary trend is emerging. Although learning resources are often considered as key intellectual property in a competitive higher education world, more and more institutions and individuals are sharing digital learning resources over the Internet openly and without cost, as open educational resources (OER).

Higher education is facing a number of challenges: globalisation, an aging society, growing competition between higher educational institutions both nationally and internationally, and rapid technological development. OER is itself one of these challenges, but may also be a sound strategy for individual institutions to meet them. The trend towards sharing software programmes (open source software) and research outcomes (open access publishing) is already so strong that it is generally thought of as a movement. It is now complemented by the trend towards sharing learning resources – the open educational resources movement.

OER is not only a fascinating technological development and potentially a major educational tool. It accelerates the blurring of formal and informal learning, and of educational and broader cultural activities. It raises basic philosophical issues to do with the nature of ownership, with the validation of knowledge and with concepts such as altruism and collective goods. It reaches into issues of property and its distribution across the globe. It offers the prospect of a radically new approach to the sharing of knowledge, at a time when effective use of knowledge is seen more and more as the key to economic success, for both individuals and nations. How paradoxical this may turn out to be, and the form it will eventually take are entirely unforeseeable.

OER projects can expand access to learning for everyone, but most of all for non-traditional groups of students, and thus widen participation in higher education. They can be an efficient way of promoting lifelong learning, both for individuals and for government, and can bridge the gap between non-formal, informal and formal learning.

WHAT ARE OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES?

The definition of OER currently most often used is «digitised materials offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning and research». OER includes learning content, software tools to develop, use and distribute content, and implementation resources such as open licences. «Oeducational resources» refers to accumulated digital assets that can be adjusted and which provide benefits without restricting the possibilities for others to enjoy them.

WHO IS USING AND PRODUCING OER AND HOW MUCH?

The learning content at issue is open courseware, *i.e.* educational material organised as courses and typically distributed as PDF files, as well as smaller chunks of learning,

often referred to as learning objects. The content may involve websites, simulations, text files, images, sound or videos in digital format, some only for use and others open also for adaptation and reuse. Although no definite statistics are available, there is a rapid expansion in the number of OER projects, as well as the number of people involved and the number of resources available. In January 2007 the OECD identified over 3.000 open courseware courses available from over 300 universities worldwide. In repositories such as MERLOT, Connexions, OpenLearn and others, there are hundreds of thousands of pieces of content or materials representing thousands of freely available learning hours. Although the dominant language so far is English, translation of resources combined with a growing number of non-English OER projects cater for greater language diversity and increased global use. The potential number of users is enormous.

With the scattered data available, only a general picture can be given of the users and producers of OER. The majority of producers of resources and OER projects are located in English-speaking countries in the developed world. The movement grows both top-down and bottom-up: new projects are started at institutional level and individual teachers and researchers also use and produce OER on their own initiative. The institutions involved so far seem to be well-reputed internationally or in their countries, rather than institutions that are unknown or have low status.

WHY ARE PEOPLE SHARING FOR FREE?

The reasons for individuals and institutions to use, produce and share OER can be divided into basic technological, economic, social and legal drivers:

✓ The technological and economic drivers include improved, less costly and more user-friendly information technology infrastructure (such as broadband), hardware and software. Content is cheaper and easier to produce and costs can be further reduced by sharing. New economic models are emerging around the distribution of free content. Legal drivers are new licensing schemes that facilitate free sharing and reuse of content. Social drivers include increased willingness to share.

✓ A technical barrier is lack of broadband availability. Lack of resources to invest in hardware and software for developing and sharing OER is an economic barrier. Barriers such as these are often mentioned as significant obstacles in developing countries. Social barriers include lack of skills to use the technical innovations and cultural obstacles against sharing or using resources developed by other teachers or institutions.

There are three arguments for governments to support OER projects:

✓ They expand access to learning for everyone but most of all for non-traditional groups of students and thus widen participation in higher education.

✓ They can be an efficient way of promoting lifelong learning for both the individual and the government.

✓ They can bridge the gap between non-formal, informal and formal learning.

Institutions mention six types of reasons for being involved in OER projects:

✓ The altruistic argument that sharing knowledge is in line with academic traditions and a good thing to do.

✓ Educational institutions (particularly those publicly financed) should leverage taxpayers' money by allowing free sharing and reuse of resources.

✓ Quality can be improved and the cost of content development reduced by sharing and reusing.

✓ It is good for the institution's public relations to have an OER project as a showcase for attracting new students.

✓ There is a need to look for new cost recovery models as institutions experience growing competition.

✓ Open sharing will speed up the development of new learning resources, stimulate internal improvement, innovation and reuse and help the institution to keep good records of materials and their internal and external use.

A further motivation, mentioned by some major distance teaching institutions, is the risk of doing nothing in a rapidly changing environment.

Incentives for individual teachers and researchers can be summarized under four headings:

✓ The altruistic motivation of sharing (as for institutions), which again is supported by traditional academic values.

✓ Personal non-monetary gain, such as publicity, reputation within the open community or «egoboo» as it is sometimes called.

✓ Free sharing can be good for economic or commercial reasons, as a way of getting publicity, reaching the market more quickly, gaining the first-mover advantage etc.

✓ Sometimes it is not worth the effort to keep the resource closed. If it can be of value to other people one might just as well share it for free.

Independently of whether institutions are engaged in OER projects or not, OER can be expected to affect curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

With thousands of (opencourseware) courses from internationally reputed higher education institutions available for free, teachers will need to consider that students compare their curriculum with others. Since the teacher's role as supplier of reading lists and teaching materials is diminishing, OER is likely to accelerate changes in the traditional teaching role and the evolution of more independent learners. An increase in nonformal and informal learning can be expected to enhance the demand for assessment and recognition of competences gained outside formal learning settings.

COPYRIGHT AND OPEN LICENCES

Copyright law takes its definition from international conventions and is similar in most countries. Copyright primarily serves an economic function by granting creators monopoly rights in their creations for a limited time. While information technology makes it possible to multiply and distribute content worldwide and almost at no cost, legal restrictions on the reuse of copyright material hamper its negotiability in the digital environment. Frustrated by this

obstacle, academics worldwide have started to use open licences to create a space in the Internet world – a creative commons – where people can share and reuse copyright material without fear of being sued. To do this, copyright owners have to agree or give permission for their material to be shared through a generic licence that gives permission in advance. The Creative Commons licence is by far the best-known licence for such content, the use of which is growing exponentially.

HOW CAN OER PROJECTS BE SUSTAINED IN THE LONG RUN?

The actual costs of an OER project vary considerably. Some initiatives have institutional backing involving professional staff, others build on communities of practitioners and rely on their voluntary work. There are all sorts of in-between models as well. Repositories can be organised as a place to share and exchange resources, which means that people are either users or producers, or they can promote the collaborative production of common resources. The first model is called the *user-producer* model and the second the *co-production* model, although again there are intermediate positions.

The first model is more likely to be centralised than the latter. Although real costs can be met with resources other than money, most initiatives need to raise some capital. To this end a number of models for cost recovery are identified: the *replacement* model, in which open content replaces other uses and benefits from cost savings; the foundation, donation or *endowment* model in which funding for the project is provided by an external actor; the *segmentation* model, in which the provider offers «valueadded» services to user segments and charges them for these services; the *conversion* model, in which «you give something away for free and then convert the consumer to a paying customer»; as well as the voluntary support model or *membership* model, which is based on fund-raising campaigns or paying members.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO AND USEFULNESS OF OER

Advocates of the open movement should consider actions for improving access to and usefulness of existing resources. The rapidly growing number of learning materials and repositories makes it important to find the most relevant and highest quality resources. *Metadata* (descriptive information about the resources) may improve the function of search engines, but adding good quality metadata to resources is difficult and time consuming. Alternative approaches such as automatically generated metadata and folksonomies are being tested, but whether these are scaleable solutions remains to be seen. *Quality* can be improved in many ways. There is a troublesome imbalance between the *provision* of OER and its *utilisation*. The vast majority of OER is in English and based on Western culture, and this limits their relevance and risks consigning less developed countries to playing the role of consumers. However, a number of projects now exist in developing countries to develop OER based on their own languages and cultures.

Since the concept of OER builds on the idea of reusing and repurposing materials, *interoperability* is a key issue. Learning resources need to be searchable across repositories and possible to download, integrate and adapt across platforms. Software applications developed at different points in time and by different developers should be able to operate together. Open standards makes this possible. The development of new standards is a specialised task which requires financial support.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The OER movement has implications at many policy levels. *Interoperability* issues, such as harmonisation of copyright legislation and agreements on standards, are dealt with at the international level. A good *knowledge base* regarding the OER movement needs to be developed internationally, with *awareness raising* activities to make the concept of OER better known. Funding bodies on all levels are recommended to support these activities.

At a national level OER represents a further *blurring of the borders* between formal and informal learning, and countries are recommended to study how OER can be efficiently used to meet some of the demand for increased lifelong learning. OER can make an important contribution to a diversified supply of learning resources. A plethora of digital learning resources supports methodological diversity, which again is a pre-requisite for promoting individualisation of the learning process. Governments are advised to take a *holistic approach* towards digital learning resources, of which OER is but one part.

A *review of the existing copyright regime* in order to promote further use of information technology in education should consider actions to create at least a neutral policy regarding commercial actors and OER. Governments willing to promote OER should earmark a small proportion of funds made available for education for openly publishing education materials developed within publicly funded institutions, as well as open up national digital archives and museum collections to the education sector. *Public-private partnerships* should be used more as a way to combine know-how and resources from both sectors. Wherever possible and reasonable *open standards* should be used and *open source software licensing* employed.

The rapid pace of development of the OER movement means that it will soon have an impact on all higher education institutions. This calls for management of institutions to consider *the risk of doing nothing*. Higher education institutions are advised to have an *information technology strategy* which includes, among other things, how the institution should deal with the opportunities and threats posed by the OER movement. Institutions willing to embrace the opportunities offered by OER should create *incentives* for faculty members to participate in the initiative, such as implementing teaching portfolios with at least one OER element, as part of the tenure process. The use of OER in teaching should also be encouraged and training offered. ▣

✓ CREDITS Executive Summary, Giving Knowledge for Free: The Emergence of Open Educational Resources, © OECD 2007. www.oecd.org/bookshop?926403174X

THE AFRICAN VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

Acknowledging the concept of OER as one of the most promising developments in education and training today, the African Virtual University (AVU) has developed a collaborative and co-ordinated strategy for the creation, organisation, dissemination and utilisation of OER in Africa. The AVU initiative was inspired by the belief that knowledge and education are for the common good, and not owned, that OER will significantly contribute to the advancement of human knowledge, creativity and welfare and that by sharing it is possible to avoid needless duplication of limited resources. The AVU has developed a conceptual framework and architecture to join the needs of learners, teachers and researchers in Africa to the OER movement worldwide.

A number of OER initiatives already exist within the AVU, such as the Development Gateway OER topic page, MIT OCW materials, the WiderNeteGranary initiative, Commonwealth of Learning STAMP materials, TESSA programme materials, AVU Digital Library, and others. One purpose of the architecture is to unite all these initiatives under one strategy.

Starting with a gap analysis, the AVU outlined four prominent views among African academics regarding the promotion of open content:

- ✓ Lack of support from the relevant governing bodies would exacerbate already poor participation.
- ✓ Lack of clear quality assurance mechanisms would result in unclear standards («if it's free it must be rubbish»).
- ✓ Potential for open content to be a «white elephant» so that significant start-up costs diminish enthusiasm.
- ✓ Ambiguous intellectual property rights policies leading to lack of faculty participation.

In a pilot project local mirror sites were installed with opencourseware material from MIT, supported by workshops at each of the sites. Although the pilot resulted in strong support for the open licence concept several obstacles preventing educators and learners from accessing and using the MIT opencourseware website were identified, such as a general lack of familiarity with OER, insufficient technological resources, including access to computers and a fast Internet connection at affordable rates, and low computer literacy and a need for capacity enhancement.

The architecture is grounded in an analysis of existing theories and perspectives concerning the global OER movement and the AVU's own experience in establishing processes, systems and frameworks of design, development, managing and sharing OER on the African continent. This architecture has four parts:

- ✓ *Creation*: Developing capacity to create OER «from scratch»; structured communities of «users and producers»; interoperability and compliance; iterative processes for creation of OER; localisation and contextualisation of OER.
- ✓ *Organisation*: Governance and management schemes; storage and portal mechanisms; tagging and metadata systems; repository development; institutional development; developing a knowledge sharing culture.
- ✓ *Dissemination*: Sensitisation (awareness and responsiveness to cultural issues); delivery methods for remote and local access to OER; packaging and marketing; scalability of delivery; decentralisation vs. centralisation or a combination of both.
- ✓ *Utilisation*: Mechanisms for accessing and updating OER repositories; using and reusing content; re-authoring and re-purposing content; quality assurance mechanisms; accreditation of materials; sustainability and business modelling.

The architecture has been discussed with several organisations, and implementation is now under way. A modular approach is taken to the development and implementation, which is planned to end in September 2008. ▣

✓ INFO SOURCE: «Bateman (2006) and www.avu.org .

THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCES

Creative Commons licences are part of a genre of licences that are used to negotiate legal rights in digital content. Many other types of open content licences exist; however, the Creative Commons licences have gained significant attention and popularity over the last three years. The Creative Commons licences are not designed for software, but are intended for use in relation to other kinds of creative copyright material: websites, educational materials, music, film, photographs, blogs etc.

Along with the text of the various open content licences, the project has developed metadata that can be used to associate creative works with their licence status in a machine-readable way. In addition to certain 'baseline' rights and restrictions which are included in all Creative Commons licences, the copyright owner can choose among a number of licensing options, which can be used alone or in combination.

BASELINE FEATURES

The following features are common to all Creative Commons licences:

- ✓ Licensees are granted the right to copy, distribute, display, digitally perform and make verbatim copies of the work into the same or another format.

✓ The licences have worldwide application for the entire duration of copyright and are irrevocable.

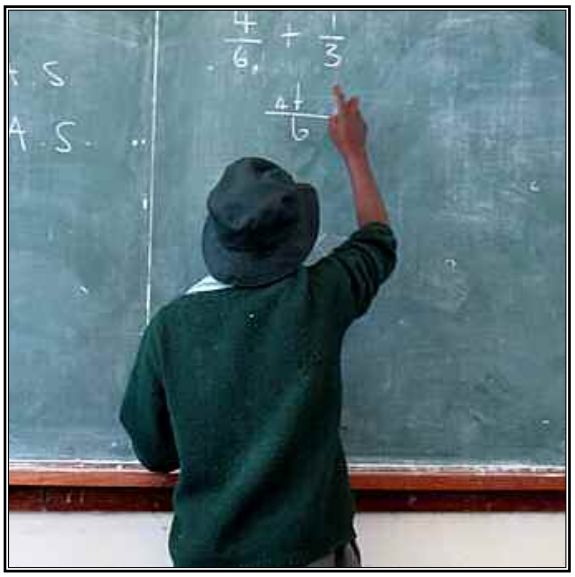
✓ Licensees cannot use technological protection measures to restrict access to the work.

✓ Copyright notices should not be removed from copies of the work.

✓ Every copy of the work should maintain a link to the licence.

✓ Attribution must be given to the creator of the copyright work (BY).

✓ They are «fair use/fair dealing plus» in that they grant a layer of protection on top of and in addition to the scope of activity that is permitted under existing copyright exceptions and limitations.



OPTIONAL FEATURES

Copyright owners can choose from among the following optional licence conditions:

✓ Non-commercial (NC): Others are permitted to copy, distribute, display and perform the copyright work – and any derivative works based upon it – but for non-commercial purposes only.

✓ No derivative works (ND): Others are permitted to copy, distribute, display and perform exact copies of the work only and cannot make derivative works based upon it.

✓ Share Alike (SA): Others may distribute derivative works only under a licence identical to that covering the original work.

By mixing and matching these elements, copyright owners can choose between the following six core licences:

✓ Attribution (BY): This is the most accommodating of the licences offered, in terms of what others can do with the work. It lets others copy, distribute, reuse and build upon the work, even commercially, as long as they credit the copyright owner for the original creation.

✓ Attribution-Non-commercial (BY-NC): This licence lets others copy, distribute, reuse and build upon the work, as long as it is not for commercial purposes and they credit the copyright holder as the original author.

✓ Attribution-Share Alike (BY-SA): This licence lets others reuse and build upon the work even for commercial purposes, as long as they credit the copyright holder and license any derivative works under identical terms.

✓ Attribution-Non-commercial-Share Alike (BY-NC-SA): This licence lets others reuse and build upon the work, as long as it is for non-commercial purposes, they credit the copyright holder and they license their new creations under identical terms.

✓ Attribution-No Derivatives (BY-ND): This licence allows use of a work in its current form for both commercial and non-commercial purposes, as long as it is not changed in any way or used to make derivative works, and credit is given to the original author.

✓ Attribution-Non-commercial-No Derivatives (BY-NC-ND): This is the most restrictive of the six core licences. It is often called the «advertising» licence because it only allows a work to be copied and shared with others in its original form, and only for non-commercial purposes and where credit is given to the original author. This licence does not allow the creation of derivative works or the use of the work for commercial purposes.

The licences come in three layers:

1 – A «human-readable» Commons Deed, (a simple summary of the licence) which describes the freedoms associated with the content in terms anyone should be able to understand.

2 – A «lawyer-readable» Legal Code – a (dense legal «fine print») licence – that makes enforceable the freedoms associated with the content.

3 – Machine-readable metadata that makes the freedoms associated with the content understandable by computers.

Both the first and the second layer are 'ported' (linguistically translated and legally adapted) into other languages.

The Creative Commons licences were launched in December 2002. One year later there were about 1 million linkbacks to the Creative Commons licence. In December 2004 there were 6 million linkbacks and, in December 2005, 45 million. In June 2006 there were 145 million linkbacks, a clear sign that the use of Creative Commons licences is growing exponentially.

As of June 2006, the use of the different licence options had the following distribution:

✓ Attribution (BY) is used by 96,6% of all licensors.

✓ Non-commercial option (NC) 67,5%.

✓ Share Alike (SA) 45,4%.

✓ No derivatives (ND) 24,3%.

There seems to be a tendency over time towards people choosing more flexible licences. The use of the NC option has decreased from 74% in February 2005, and the same trend is visible for the ND and SA options (down from 33% and 49% respectively in February 2005). It also worth noting that two-thirds of all licensors permit derivative works. ▣

✓ INFO SOURCE: «*Creative Commons,* Fitzgerald (2006).»

NEWSROOM

ICT CHANGING THE FORTUNES OF RURAL COMMINITIES

The life-changing initiative is being spearheaded by the Coastal Oceans Research and Development Indian Ocean (CORDIO) in partnership with the Suganthi Devadason Marine Research Institute (SDMRI) India and Nykopings Folkhogskola School of Sweden with support from the Swedish Program for ICT in Developing Regions (SPIDER).

The project, dubbed 'empowering Self-Help Groups in Kenya through ICT for better education and alternative livelihood opportunities', aims at alleviating poverty, promoting sustainable development and empowering self-help groups through an integrated approach.

The women's groups are assisted with ICT training and facilities to engage in alternative livelihood activities. The project initially sponsored a number of trainees - largely women – to attend a computer college. The computer course included an introduction to some Microsoft products, including Windows, Word, Excel and PowerPoint, as well as Internet use. Others have been trained in the workings of the community payphone project and supplied with the necessary equipment, including mobile phones. The training covers topics like phone operation techniques, security and its benefits.

The project is being implemented in collaboration with the local national women's network, local administration, mobile telephony service providers, the social service and fisheries departments.

Kenya is still confronted with enormous challenges as it attempts to close the digital divide. The ICT infrastructure development in Kenya has been concentrated mainly in the urban areas, but even in the urban sector, some regions are more highly developed than others. Regional differences in economic development and population density across the country have also resulted in some areas considerably lagging behind.

LAUNCH OF THE ZERO ILLITERACY PROJECT

On Saturday, April 26, 2008 the Zero Illiteracy Project (ZIP) was formally launched at the 2008 World Association of NGOs (WANGO) Africa Conference in Accra, Ghana. ZIP is a novel service program directed at improving the level of literacy (including Information and Community Technology education) to the barest minimum in Africa. Done under the auspices of WANGO, and coordinated by its Africa Regional Secretariat, it is an initiative designed to use a new approach and methodology that makes everyone a stakeholder. The goal of ZIP is to substantially reduce the level of illiteracy, particularly at the grassroots level, using non-profit organizations (NGOs, charity organizations, civil society organizations) as drivers of the change.

ZIP is designed to utilize new strategies and approaches that are grassroots oriented and targeting volunteers from across the world in achieving results. The ultimate advantage for ZIP is the use of the worldwide network of NGOs available via WANGO, with a broad-based outreach.

While the primary aim of ZIP is to fill the literacy gap in African society, a secondary result will be the enhancing of development in society by creating greater political awareness, reducing poverty through self-reliance programs, and improving the health and social status of individuals. The curriculum reform is targeted essentially at: 1) better learning for all children of school age; 2) increased access to education for adults in a school-based format; and 3) extra-moral education plus computer training.

The target beneficiaries of ZIP are school dropouts, adults, and the less privileged. In implementing the ZIP, Extremely Disadvantaged Areas (EDAs) are to be identified and volunteers as well as local mentors used to reach out to the target audience.

The ZIP is to be piloted in 15 African countries (3 from each region). It is projected to lift the statistic of African literates from its current level to over 80% by the year 2015.

www.wango.org/africa2008/ziplaunch.htm

MORE THAN TELEVISION: DISCOVERY CHANNEL'S NON-PROFIT INITIATIVE ENCOURAGES LEARNING

TV can be used as a powerful tool for learning in schools where textbooks and teaching materials are rare – this is demonstrated

by the following success story from one of DCGEP's (Discovery Global Education Partnership) Learning Centers.

The learning content is developed in close collaboration with the communities, to meet their specific needs and to produce culturally-relevant programming. The programmes cover Physical Sciences, Cultures, Geography, Health, Biology and many other topics.

Besides serving educational purposes, the Learning Centers also provide the communities with access to national and international news, as well as the opportunity to enjoy live sports events. Although mostly set up in schools, Learning Centers can be established in any location central to community life. Most Learning Centers are utilised as community centers after school hours providing workshops on HIV/AIDS, other critical public health issues and skills training. The sites for Learning Centers are carefully selected. After three years of training and monitoring, the Learning Centers become a self-sustaining resource for the community.

Having started in South Africa as Discovery Communications' corporate initiative, DCGEP, now an independent non-profit organisation currently reaches over 515,000 students and 6,900 teachers in Africa alone. Globally, the organisation works in 11 countries in three regions of the world (Africa, Eastern Europe and Latin America). Seven of these countries (Angola, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe) are in Africa with expansion activities currently underway in four new African countries (Egypt, Ghana, Kenya and Morocco). As of today, DCGEP has reached over 611,000 children and 1,833,000 community members have access to Learning Center facilities. There are currently 221 active DCGEP Learning Centers.

EU

THE TEMPUS PROGRAMME: MODERNISING HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE EU'S NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

The European Commission has launched the fourth phase of the Tempus programme, which supports the modernisation of higher education in the 28 partner countries of Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East. A conference held in Cairo, Egypt, on 7-8 May 2008 will concentrate on the issue of quality and the experience of the Tempus programme in this field since its beginnings in 1990. The conference will also serve as a platform for dialogue between academics, experts and students from the 27 EU Member States and 28 Tempus partner countries.

With Tempus, the European Commission is creating an area of cooperation in the field of higher education between the European Union and its neighbours. Since 1990, Tempus has funded 6500 projects, involving 2000 universities from the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East.

Between 2000 and 2006, 788 Joint European Projects and 1492 individual mobility grants were funded. In addition, during the same period, Tempus supported 270 structural and complementary measures.

The results of a study commissioned by the European Commission indicate that Tempus has had a considerable impact, particularly by setting in motion the long and difficult shift towards output-oriented rather than input-oriented education. The former revolves around the concept of what a person actually *knows* (the learning outcome), while the traditional, input-oriented, approach concentrated more on *how long* or *where* the person acquired that knowledge (the learning inputs).

COMMISSION LAUNCHES INITIATIVE TO FACILITATE MOBILITY IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The European Commission has presented plans for a Europe-wide credit system in vocational education and training. This system, called ECVET, would make it easier for citizens to get formal recognition of knowledge, skills and competences they have gained in another country. Member States are encouraged to sign up to this voluntary scheme that does not seek to replace national systems but to facilitate the transfer between them.

Education systems in Europe are highly fragmented and often complex. Vocational education and training are no exception in this respect. The number of different qualifications and procedures, even within one country, can make it difficult to transfer the results of learning from one system, or learning context, to another.

By facilitating such transfer situations, the *European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training* (ECVET) supports citizens' mobility and gives them better access to lifelong learning, whether in formal, non-formal or informal contexts. In ECVET, units of learning outcomes are defined with an associated number of credit points. This in turn helps qualification-awarding authorities in the Member States to translate learning outcomes and associated points acquired elsewhere into their own vocational training qualifications system.

ECVET is fully compatible with both the European credit system in higher education and national systems in vocational education and training. The Commission's proposal takes the form of a recommendation, now submitted for approval to the European Parliament and the Council. Member States would eventually adopt it on a voluntary basis and implement it according to their own rules.

UN

LID TO BASIC EDUCATION STAGNATING, SAYS UNESCO'S EFA GLOBAL MONITORING REPORT

In spite of promises to support basic education, aid commitments are stagnating and remain far short of what is required to achieve universal primary education, according to a recent analysis by the Education for All Global Monitoring Report team.

Several trends are reason for concern. First, while aid to basic education increased in 2006 over the previous year, it remained below its 2004 level.

Second, aid to basic education has only increased at the same rate as total aid, reflecting the fact that most donors have not assigned a higher priority to basic education in their overall aid package.

Third, figures released this month by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) show that total official development assistance dropped by 8.4% in 2007, probably resulting in a further reduction in aid to basic education.

The 2008 EFA Global Monitoring Report estimates that roughly US$ 11 billion a year is needed to achieve education for all in low-income countries. Yet aid to basic education will reach only US$ 6 billion by 2010 even if the promises of the Gleneagles G-8 summit in 2005 are met and if basic education is given the same priority as at present in aid portfolios.

The Report argues that if bilateral donors allocated at least 10% of their sector aid to basic education this could lead to a total allocation of US$ 10 billion in 2010.

75 MILLION CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL, ACCORDING TO NEW UIS DATA

The number of primary-school-age children not in school fell by 2 million worldwide between 2005 and 2006, according to new estimates published by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).

The latest education statistics show that 75 million children were out of school in 2006, down from 103 million in 1999. Girls account for more than one half of the out-of-school population.

The 72 million figure reported for 2005 and published in the EFA Global Monitoring Report has been revised upwards to 77 million, based on new population estimates released by the (UNPD) in 2007. Both sets of figures confirm a 25% decrease since 1999 in the number of out-of-school children.

From a regional perspective, South and West Asia reported the greatest progress. This was mainly due to changes in India, where the number of children out of school fell by over 12 million as participation in primary education significantly improved for girls (accounting for more than 75% of the decrease). Sub-Saharan Africa also made important strides, with a reduction of 10 million. This was largely the result of progress reported by the Governments of Ethiopia and the United Republic of Tanzania.

LANDMARK UN CONVENTION SECURES RIGHT TO EDUCATION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

On 3 April 2008, Ecuador became the 20th government to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, causing the treaty's entry into force. The Convention opens up educational opportunities for thousands of people with disabilities who have been excluded from learning.

Inclusion is rooted in the right to education as enshrined in Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is also enforced in UNESCO's Convention against Discrimination in Education. However, disabled children still account for one third of all out-of-school children – a clear case of blatant educational exclusion.

It is estimated that there are at least 650 million people with disabilities worldwide, of whom approximately 80 percent live in less developed countries.

Ex Africa semper aliquid novi.
[There is always something new out of Africa.]
PLINY THE ELDER

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