

## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT



### Special Policy Dialogue

#### *“Education Challenges in Africa and LDCs”*

Thursday, 7 July 2011

10:00 am – 1:00 pm

### Background

The ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) was established in 2005 to track progress and strengthen efforts towards the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals, by the target date of 2015. The theme for 2011 is “Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to education.”<sup>1</sup>

Since the adoption of the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals in 2000, there has been significant progress towards universal primary education (UPE) during the past decade, especially in developing countries. In Africa and Least Developed Countries (LDCs), net primary education enrollment has substantially increased, and the gender gap in enrolment and attendance continue to close. A number of countries are on track to achieve Universal Primary Education and gender equality in education by 2015.

Despite the encouraging progress in access to primary education, the primary school completion rate is still lagging. Millions of children and adolescents continue to drop out of school, without acquiring basic education, knowledge and skills. In addition, many children and youth remain totally excluded from education due to financial, social, cultural or physical barriers.

The absolute number of out-of-school children was approximately 67 million worldwide in 2008. Close to half of them live in Sub-Saharan Africa (29 million) and a quarter in South and West Asia (18 million). More than a third of out-of-school children are estimated to live in low-income countries affected by conflict.<sup>2</sup> An estimated 40 million of these children have a disability.

The background paper for the AMR Regional Preparatory meeting for Africa held in Togo in April 2011 indicated that “the single biggest drain on limited education resources is the low primary school completion rate”. Compared to access, the learning outcomes of education have not been closely examined until recently. As indicated by a recent analysis of 21 countries in sub-Saharan Africa which found 40 per cent of youth with five years of education being illiterate<sup>3</sup>, the numbers of years attending school does not guarantee the acquisition of necessary literacy and numeracy skills. Those who drop out, or receive low quality education will most likely be trapped in inter-generational poverty, and have little access to meaningful job opportunities. From national perspectives, this reflects a lack of purchasing power, uneducated and unskilled human resources and a potential for social instability, as there is a high risk for them being recruited into illicit or criminal activities.

To enhance the quality of and equity in education, it is important to address underlying causes that hampered progress, including high drop-out rates and grade repetition, poor quality of education, teacher shortages, teacher development and deployment, inadequate infrastructure and supplies, and difficulties to reach most vulnerable children and youth, often living in urban informal settlements, or rural and remote areas.

Identifying and addressing existing challenges and developing a more coherent, integrated cross-sectoral strategies in Africa and LDCs is therefore critical for making further progress in achieving EFA and MDG goals.

<sup>1</sup> The first AMR focused on poverty and hunger (MDG 1) in 2007, the second AMR on sustainable development (MDG 7) in 2008, the third AMR on health (MDGs 4, 5, 6) in 2009 and the forth one on gender (MDG 3) in 2010.

<sup>2</sup> EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011, The hidden crisis: armed conflict and education

<sup>3</sup> E/2011/83, page 12

## Introduction

One of the most noticeable and remarkable characteristics of Africa today is that out of approximately one billion people, 40 per cent are under the age of 15, and 68 per cent are under the age of 30 years old<sup>4</sup>. Africa is the only continent where the youth population continues to expand while the number of young people stabilizes in other regions. Africa has a huge 'youth bulge' of tens of millions of vibrant, energetic young men and women; their educational and job needs must be addressed as a matter of urgency. The current thinking, from conflict prevention to socio-economic development and the peacebuilding agendas increasingly recognize that lack of access to basic social services and job opportunities are intricately interconnected to peace, stability and development.

Education is one of the most far-reaching requirements for development, alleviating poverty, improving health outcomes and quality of life, reducing gender and social disparities, and enhancing economic productivity. Education contributes to economic growth and societal stability through developing individuals equipped with cognitive and life skills necessary for sustaining the livelihood, and contributing to the productive sector.

Recognizing the linkage between investment in education and potential economic growth<sup>5</sup>, African governments have made concerted efforts at national and sub-regional levels, including the adoption of a Sector Wide Approach (SWAp), the initiation of a project on literacy for development in Africa, the abolition of primary school fees in almost all countries. Over the past decade, public expenditure on education has risen by 6 per cent annually across sub-Saharan Africa, according to the recent report by UNESCO on "Financing Education in Sub-Saharan Africa". The NEPAD Secretariat organized an African Union workshop to finalize a strategy for teacher development, to be implemented during the Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006-2015). A number of educational institutions in Africa have introduced e-schools on a trial basis, along with the NEPAD blue print on E-education. In addition, the NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency has been promoting several education and human resources development initiatives in health, mathematics and science, and forestry.

In spite of these positive developments, there is rising concern on the quality of the education provided to children as observed with the increasing number of dropouts. More concerns are arising on the fact that education systems are not adequately preparing students to meet the demands and challenges of tomorrow's world. The nature of the labour markets is constantly changing, with much accelerated pace due to globalization. The current education systems may not be adequately equipped for producing national human resources to match the demands of the labour market. To better anticipate labour market trends and needs, closer partnership with various stakeholders and international partners, including the private sector and academia, civil society organizations, international communities, is necessary. In particular, the private sector and philanthropic organizations can play a valuable role, because of their knowledge of emerging sectors, such as green economy, and their capacity in investing in human resources, including ICT for education. ICT can increase access to education for wider population and enhance the quality of education.

While improvements in quality of and equity in education can be achieved at low cost, some areas may require increased resources. In 2007, the pupil-to-teacher ratio at the primary level increased by nearly 2 per cent to 46.6 per cent<sup>6</sup>. With this rate, additional 1.2 million qualified teachers are required to ensure a good learning environment for all. While African countries have overcome the negative effects of the recent global crises better than previous crises, their impact could potentially undermine the progress made in education. As such, many countries are facing the task of not only maintaining the current levels of expenditure, but also covering the additional costs for improving the quality of education.

Innovative approaches for resource mobilization need to be identified, including strengthening domestic and international investments in education, debt management, increasing efficiency in using resources, strengthening public-private partnership, as well as improving the targeting of allocations to the most disadvantaged. The recent Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative enabled fourteen African countries to

<sup>4</sup> Computations using UN World Population Prospects Data –Revision 2010

<sup>5</sup> According to African Child Policy Forum fact sheet, "Investing in Education", it is estimated that one additional year of education per person results, on average, in 6 percent per capita GDP growth.

<sup>6</sup> African Development Bank Group Data Portal, cited in the SG's report on Social Dimensions of New Partnership for Africa's Development (E/CN.5/2011/4)

redirect resources to fund health, education and infrastructure programmes. Yet, in spite of the economic sense to heavily invest in education, the average annual financing gap for the period 2008-2015 is about 65 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa compared to 30 per cent in South Asia<sup>7</sup>. African countries and LDCs can learn from the experience of other regions, in particular countries with emerging economies, in providing basic education and skills-training as a part of the overall national development and poverty reduction strategies.

A wider and new vision for education will enable countries to better respond to innovation and rapidly changing environments. Education should be considered as life long/continuing learning. Literacy and skills development can be achieved through technical and vocational education and training. A wide range of formal and informal education beyond primary education, including secondary, tertiary, and preschool, youth and adult literacy and skills training, civic and life-skill education and vocational training, need to be fully considered, in order to better respond to globalization, as well as nurture the citizens of next generations, equipped with knowledge, skills and values to contribute to the development of the countries.

## **Objective**

The special policy dialogue aims to promote an exchange of views on the issue of education challenges in Africa and LDCs and propose relevant policy recommendations.

The panel comprising of high level representatives of Governments and experts will discuss the most up-to-date thinking and policy measures that can be applied to advance the achievement of quality education for all. The panel will also highlight good practices and lessons learned that can be replicated to other countries, based on national experience.

## **Conceptual framework**

The substantive framework for the speaker presentations in the special policy dialogue will be developed around the following key questions:

- What are the emerging educational needs in Africa and LDCs?
- What improvements are needed to education systems?
- How can the needed changes be brought about?
- What are the role of the private sector and other stakeholders in addressing the gaps in education in Africa?

## **Format of the special dialogue**

The panel will be comprised of 4 - 5 panelists and a moderator. The three hour session will consist of presentations by panelists, followed by question-and-answer and interactive dialogue.

The Chair will make a brief statement to set the tone, and introduce the panelists and the moderator. Each speaker will be requested to make 10 minutes interventions. The moderator will monitor time for presentations and allocate appropriate time for Q & A, following the presentations. At the end of the presentations, the moderator will give a brief summary of presentations, and identify 4 - 5 key issues and policy recommendations. The moderator will be responsible for channeling questions and managing the interactive process. At the end of the interactive dialogue, the panelists will be invited to make short interventions. The moderator concludes the dialogue by presenting a brief summary on education challenges in Africa and LDCs, and key policy recommendations. The Chair will conclude the session.

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<sup>7</sup> UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010