

EDUCATION FOR POVERTY ERADICATION: AN APPROACH TO HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

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Ministerial Roundtable Breakfast on “Education for poverty eradication: an approach to human resources development”
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1. Poverty in human development terms is not simply about lack of material wealth and resources. It is fundamentally about a lack of choice in meeting basic needs as well as in dealing with the forces that shape our quality of life.
2. The poor often do not have much choice over many things that affect them, ranging from food, shelter, health and safety to the more complex needs that require them to be active participants in the economic system and members of civil society. (e. g. employment, purchasing power, civic rights, etc). This is what equates poverty to subsistence and a powerless existence.
3. Yet the poor, like all others in society, have much to offer in terms of human potential. They have the capacity to contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of their communities and the nation at large. We need to activate and nurture this capacity to benefit the individual and the society.
4. It is through education that individuals realise their potential to contribute to production, wealth creation and execution of various roles that make for national development. It is also through education that they are able to benefit from the distribution of wealth in the economy, have a political voice and access social goods and services to enhance their living standards.
5. These facts are well known in development circles. What is lacking is the ability to make use of the transforming power of education as one of the most important tools for eradicating poverty. It is now clear that universal basic education of the right type is a critical pre-requisite for countries to progress on the path to sustainable development. Beyond this, quality basic education for all citizens can help to lift communities out of poverty. However this will involve sectors other than education. Poverty is multi-sectoral and requires action on different fronts. Education for poverty eradication can also be a turbulent process. The newly educated demand their rights and agitate for more egalitarian and democratic norms to replace the old inequalities and injustices that often underlie poverty. These are the tensions that democratic and progressive societies must contend with on the path to development.

6 Against this background the roundtable discussion could focus on what are the immediate priorities if we are to promote and achieve education for poverty eradication. These priorities are already clearly outlined in the Millennium Development Goals, the Education for All documents, as well as in the World Fit for Children. Issues to be discussed include:

- (a) *How to reach out-of-school children (especially girls) with quality education*
- (b) *Addressing the obstacles that prevent poor children from attending school*
- (c) *Linking education to relevant life-skills and income generation opportunities*
- (d) *Using education to empower the poor regarding their rights*
- (e) *How to complement education inputs with service delivery relating to health, nutrition, food security, shelter, water and sanitation, etc.*

7 In discussing these issues the roundtable needs to be aware that some of the factors that make for success include:

- (a) *Political will to provide access to quality education for all citizens, especially those who are disadvantaged. In most situations there is a strong gender dimension involved, so that girls and women tend to be more disadvantaged in all groups.*
- (b) *Investment of a significant percentage of the public budget in education.*
- (c) *Reform of the education service delivery process for greater efficiency.*
- (d) *Promoting successful innovations and taking them to scale.*
- (e) *A strong emphasis on girls education as a lever for achieving education for all*

8 There is a unique opportunity for all countries to make progress with education through the targets that have been set for 2005 and 2015 regarding education for all and gender equity in access, completion and achievement in education. Countries need to seize this opportunity, because it comes with the promise of financial and other resources being made available to assist countries that have a credible plan and are seriously committed to achieving these goals.

9 Countries need to strengthen their capacity to deliver quality education to all their citizens, especially the poorest. This is also a time to intensify partnership and co-operation with international and bi-lateral agencies as well as with NGOs. It is now clear that for some countries this will increasingly take the form of policy dialogue and programme agreement as a basis for investing and providing budget assistance to the education sector. These forms of co-operation include Sector-Wide Approach Programmes (SWAPs), Sector Investment Programmes (SIPs) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme that is multi-sectoral.

10 Final point of advocacy for girls' education is that it offers unique advantages in terms of the ability of educated females to improve family care in general and the quality of life for households in the poorest communities.