

Preparatory Meeting for the 2005 ECOSOC High-Level Segment

16 March 2005

Round Table 2: Education and Literacy

Summary:

The international community has committed itself to promoting full literacy through quality universal primary education and quality adult literacy provisions. This requires both formal and non-formal education for the next fifty years. The **Millennium Development Goals** focused on attaining universal primary education and eliminating gender disparities. This is a key component in reduction of poverty around the world. Unfortunately, many countries are not on track to attain the MDGs related to education. The international community should take concrete action to ensure that those goals are met. Therefore, the deliberations on this round table focused on how to attain the MDGs and identified lessons learned. The following issues were discussed:

- i.) General findings in progress towards predetermined goals in education and literacy.
- ii.) Figures of quantitative considerations concerning education and literacy on a global and regional level.
- iii.) The importance of quality of education which included an identification and discussion on various positive initiatives in poor communities.
- iv.) The importance of exchanging best practices.
- v.) The importance of girls' education and the gender factor.
- vi.) Political will and effective commitment to education and literacy in the global context.

i) Progress toward the MDGs

- a) The pace of progress is insufficient to attain the MDG targets related to education and literacy by 2015.
- b) Progress toward attaining the MDGs is more important today than twenty years ago as the world is much more complex due to the phenomena's such as globalization, disasters, insecurity and crisis.

ii) Quantitative Considerations

- a) The number of out of school children for primary education is slowly reducing. This was the result of the expansion of formal schooling to children.
- b) In low income countries many children are requested to supplement family income rather than attending school. Although survival rates to grade 5 have generally increased there are still below 66% in half of the sub-Saharan African countries. In total 800 million adult are illiterate, which is 18% of adult world population. Of this figure around 2/3 are women.

iii) Quality of Education and Positive initiatives

- a) To improve the quality of education it is important to strengthen human capacities of teachers. This is important as dysfunctional schools and low quality of education systems are wide spread.
- b) Decentralization and flexibility for teachers, including balancing their autonomy with a performance assessment had positive results in many countries.
- c) The issue of real importance in education is the involvement of the parents in the functioning of schools and generally the involvement of societies as a whole. Parents therefore need to be mobilized to value quality education as well as access to education.

iv) The Exchange of Best Practices

- a) The importance of exchanging best practices in the education sector was highlighted as literacy goes beyond education and has much broader impacting on poverty alleviation, health, and the fight against HIV/AIDS.

v) The Education of Girls

- a) Throughout the course of the meeting a lot of attention was paid to the issue of girls' education and to the gender factor in a general sense. Girl's education was stressed as a key to all the other international goals.
- b) By educating girls the world can trigger positive transformation in societies as empowerment of women has multiplier affect on the well being of communities.
- c) Transparent school management and accountability was judged crucial to ensure progress in involving girls and providing adequate education to them. In more practical terms incentive measures such as the provision of a school meal encourage girls to stay in school.

vi) Political Will & Effective Commitment

- a) The roundtable agreed that much can be achieved if government, civil society, the United Nations and the donor community work together to support education in countries in need. It was also felt that the private sector could better advocate for education as an investment.
- b) Political will is key to attaining many of the commitment related to literacy and education. Education should be included in all development

and poverty alleviation plans. Removing education fees should be a priority.

- c) In addition, it was suggested that funds allocated to the education sector should be around three percent of GDP for the developing countries. This could be complemented by Official Development Assistance up to the amount of \$7 billion US Dollars per year.
- d) For significant improvements in the global level of education a long-term financial commitment is necessary to ensure that capacity is build up in the education sector. This would improve the quality of education in sustainable manner.