

Informal Summary
2011 High-level Segment of the Economic and Social Council
Thematic round table
Education for the future - Changing needs
10:00 am – 12:30 pm
8 July 2011, Geneva

H.E. Mr. Lazarous Kapambwe, President of ECOSOC, opened the Thematic Roundtable on “*Education for the Future – Changing Needs*” by stating that there is rising concern that education systems do not adequately prepare students to meet the demands of tomorrow’s world nor the labour market. In particular, many students lack basic competencies as well as problem-solving skills. The President expressed confidence that the roundtable would further assess challenges regarding education access and quality, also reflecting on current trends in the economic recovery. In concluding his statement the President welcomed new insights on meeting education challenges in the future.

Mr. Kevin Watkins, Director of the Education for All Global Monitoring Report, speaking in his role as moderator and also on behalf of Ms. Rebecca Winthrop who could not participate as a panellist, stated that the importance of education was first, in how much people valued it, and secondly, its benefits in reducing child mortality by educating women at the primary and secondary levels. Mr. Watkins underscored that education solutions rather lie in the field of empowerment than in teaching pure technical skills, and emphasized the challenges of gender equality. He concluded his statement by highlighting that both the scale of the education crisis as well as the way in which people view the crisis is important. Mr. Watkins asserted that in order to change the current situation of education, teaching and financing systems need to be improved.

Prof. Hans Rosling, Professor of International Health, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, began his presentation by describing a background of the health, economic and demographic facts that guide policy makers in providing education. Prof. Rosling introduced statistics that highlight the correlation between the indicators of number of children per women and levels of child mortality across countries over the last five decades. Prof. Rosling demonstrated how countries have achieved considerable progress in reducing child mortality as well as controlling family sizes through an emphasis on women’s health and education. This trend enables governments to provide better education to a larger number of students. However the countries that lag behind are those that are affected by conflicts.

In a second statistical example Prof. Rosling analyzed the relation between the indicators of number of children per women and income per person. In this regard countries realized significant successes in increasing incomes while stabilizing family sizes, and today 84 per cent of the global population live in countries where the average number of children is below three. Further assessing global population trends Prof. Rosling pointed out that the total global number of children born per year has stopped growing in 1990 due to falling rates of children born in middle income and developed countries. Challenges remain in the poorest parts of the world where the number of children born continues to increase.

In the final part of the presentation Prof. Rosling turned to an investigation of the correlation between the indicators of mean years of schooling for women/men (25-35 years) and income per person, again across countries and over the last five decades. He demonstrated how most countries have constantly increased education for women and men, and their incomes correspondingly. However, Prof. Rosling warned that certain countries are underperforming when it comes to transforming additional years of schooling into economic

gains and in some countries gender inequality in education persists. He concluded by stressing that countries today, even at modest economic levels, are applying effective policies towards education which enable them to perform better than developed countries did when they were at comparable levels of economic development.

Mr. Kevin Watkins summarized that in many countries there is a demographic window of opportunity for education and the global community has to strategize on ways of utilizing these opportunities by increasing investment in education quality. Mr. Watkins underscored that a low level of income is not a fixed barrier that prevents countries from achieving progress towards education, health, and other development goals.

Mr. Kentaro Toyama, Researcher, University of California, Berkeley gave a presentation on the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in education. Mr. Toyama emphasized that technology has the potential to fundamentally revolutionize education and explained that this view has become more popular over recent decades. Often people warn about the dangers of a possible digital divide between some countries that possess certain technologies and others that do not.

It is often stated that technology can improve education systems, especially in developing countries, through various new channels of learning such as distance education. Yet, Mr. Toyama warned that governments should be cautious about the view that technology is the answer to quality problems of education. As a first argument for this claim Mr. Toyama referred to the high maintenance costs that accrue after technological devices have been purchased. In such cases costs often outweigh potential benefits. Second, Mr. Toyama highlighted that technological devices can often distract from learning processes and sometimes even lead to forms of technology addiction. Finally, Mr. Toyama noted that research on the relationship between technology and education has produced mixed results. According to Mr. Toyama technology only amplifies the underlying pedagogic philosophy of school systems, and would be useless if a school's foundation was not functional.

In concluding his presentation Mr. Toyama argued that the best school systems, such as in Finland (which consistently ranks high), have limited use of technology, and that technology does not solve the problems of underperforming schools. Instead, Mr. Toyama urged nations to remember to provide good core knowledge foundation (mathematics, reading, etc.) before investing in technology since a solid basis of education allows true proficiency and progress with a strong ability to manipulate technology later on.

Mr. Kevin Watkins noted that ICT is often treated as a 'quick fix' when in fact a wider human infrastructure is required to effectively make use of technology. Secondly, Mr. Watkins remarked that if education fundamentals are mismanaged then adoption of technology becomes irrelevant to the success of the education system.

Questions and answers

The representative of the **United States** asked the presenters to expand on the importance of informal education channels. He also mentioned that the presenters might have a "classroom bias" and might be underestimating the importance of informal education systems.

The representative of **Guatemala** asked Professor Rosling to expand on the links of public expenditure and education quality and coverage.

The representative of **Bangladesh** highlighted the progress in the education sector of his country and noted that it is important to sustain those efforts. He requested support from development partners for the education initiatives and asked partners to share their successful

experiences in the education sector. The representative asked the panel to expand on the experience of international cooperation on education development.

The representative of **UNESCO** asked the panel to expand on their recommendations for African countries and for LDCs regarding ways to improve their education systems.

Mr. Toyama responded that technology in education could potentially be useful in fostering education attainment. Nevertheless, he recommended caution before investing in too much technology without having the proper foundations that are needed for the correct use of technologies. He emphasized the role of teachers and parents above technology in enhancing educational attainment.

Mr. Rosling also mentioned that nothing can replace the teacher in the classroom as first best option. He noted that parallel to including ICTs in education, other developments are needed for its proper function, for example, a stable electric grid. With respect to the link between government expenditure in education and education quality and coverage, the professor mentioned that there is no good causal literature on the matter hence it is hard to know if there is an actual link between expenditure and better education. He noted that while money is necessary, it would need to be spent well and concluded by highlighting the importance of development aid for education, health, and infrastructure. He stated that donors need to strengthen efforts to finance those sectors and currently they are not doing so.

Mr. Kevin Watkins endorsed Mr. Toyama's approach in that technology is not a substitute for teachers. Responding to **UNESCO**, he noted that contrary to earlier promises made in Dakar, donor countries are not on target to reach the financial commitment of approximately 16 billion dollars required for education with funding stagnating at 3 billion dollars or less. A global fund for education is needed to bring education back on the agenda of the G8 and the G20 and to ensure engagement.

The representative of **Cameroon** asked how to avoid the dependency and negative attitude of children in African countries, caused by the increased use of computers.

The representative of **Senegal** wondered if the statement made in paragraph 43 of the draft ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration is too weak and proposed calling for a global fund for education that would be used primarily for the training of teachers and school infrastructure.

The representative of **Finland** noted that the role of the teacher is the most important in the education process and technology should be seen as a tool, not as a substitute.

The representative of **Lesotho** observed the close links between education and other sectors, such as health, agriculture or social development and questioned in what way ministries are working together on issues. She asked the panel for data on her country and to expand on best practices from the health sector.

The representative of **Togo** noted that human infrastructure is most important in classrooms and asked if training of teachers should be evaluated as well.

The representative of **Namibia** asked for a common definition of education quality.

Prof. Rosling stated in response to **Lesotho** that data can be found on www.gapminder.com and agreed that a global education fund is urgently needed to help LDCs.

Mr. Toyama mentioned that there are many initiatives for ways in which technology can help education. As example he mentioned mobile computer labs and emphasized that the

investment of parents in education is fundamental for successful learning. He recommended a book titled ‘Teach like a champion’ for further teaching best practices.

Case Studies

Ms. Sylvia Schmitt, Advisor, Division of Education, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development discussed the development of Germany’s new education strategy for its development assistance policy and programme. One of the central concerns is understanding better the so-called “black box” of learning achievement and what are the key ingredients for quality education. The strategy also continues to rely on Germany’s expertise in overseeing a “dual system” at post-primary levels of education, which requires a well designed technical and vocational training and education track. In its development cooperation, Germany emphasises dialogue and follow-up; all of its programmes are designed with the participation of partners and are evaluated afterward. Two partners with which Germany is currently working include Ethiopia and Afghanistan, where projects have ranged from support for basic education to higher education reforms and education for employment.

Mr. Álvaro Henzler, Director of Enseña Perú, spoke about his organization, which promotes teacher recruitment, training and professional development – as well as the raising of the status of teaching, in Peru. Despite rapid economic growth in his country in recent years, Mr. Henzler noted that learning achievement continues to be surprisingly low, on par with many of the LDCs. This inspired the founding of his organization, which is connected to the “Teach for All” network. The focus in Enseña Perú is on “transformative” teaching, which is organized around three principles – academic, aspiration and access. Although technology plays a role in this, Mr. Henzler expressed scepticism that technology was the missing link in ensuring high quality teaching and improved learning outcomes. In addition, his organization continues to work on strategies for recruiting the most talented university students in Peru into the education and health sectors.

Questions and answers

The representative of **India** stated that perhaps what was missing from the presenters’ accounts was the importance of strong, efficient governance and administration of education systems. This will need to be taken into account for the achievement of the EFA goals, he said. He also mentioned the need for greater efforts towards thinking innovatively about narrowing the gender gap in education. He cited one example from India which demonstrated that upper-primary female pupils were more likely to attend school and stay enrolled when given a free bicycle as transportation to and from school.

The representative of **Denmark** asked what makes teachers perform well in the classroom. Much of the research shows that the most decisive factor is number of years in service. Are there ways in which education systems can incorporate the use of incentives for teachers in order to de-link performance from experience?

In response to Denmark’s question, **Mr. Henzler** said that teachers could be motivated to perform better if a culture of evaluation permeated their careers, from recruitment to training to ongoing professional development. This would inculcate a culture of excellence early in their career development. What is less clear is exactly how evaluation, or measurement, should be performed as it can be difficult and costly to measure teacher performance. The best approach currently used is tracking teacher performance based on students’ learning outcomes.

Mr. Watkins concluded the session with two observations. First, he referred to studies by the OECD and McKinsey on countries with effective education systems, including low-income countries. The common factor across all successful systems – in developed and developing countries alike – was the high status ascribed to teachers and the professional support provided to them throughout their careers. Second, he referred to the problem of teacher recruitment and placement in developing countries. Research has demonstrated that in many developing countries, and particularly in Africa, the best teachers are often (a) in the best urban, often private schools, and (b) in the higher grades. What is needed is an effective allocation system that addresses disadvantage and the need for quality teaching interventions in the earlier years in order to promote improvements over the long term. Tanzania is one country where reforms in this vein have shown promise.