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CHILDREN WATCHING
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Director of Publication:
R. Lefort.
Editors-in-chief:
S. Williams, C. Gutman
Assistant Managing Editor:
C. Mouillère
Associate Editors:

Spanish edition:
L. Garcia (Barcelona), L. Sampedro (Paris).

Lay-out, Illustrations, Infography:
F. Ryan, G. Traiano.

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WARNING!
CHILDREN WATCHING

A hero for 88% of children around the world.

EDUCATION

The Will to Succeed
With a pragmatic sense of resolve, African education ministers commit themselves to better reaching disadvantaged groups and improving the relevance of learning.

IN BRIEF

News from UNESCO’s different sectors and regions along with new publications and audiovisual materials.

EDUCATION

An Uplift for the Valley
In an isolated region of Morocco, villagers are gradually improving their livelihood, with a helping hand from an association that believes in solidarity.

BIOTECHNOLOGIES

Towards a Brave New World?
Three experts sort through the hopes and fears raised by this highly controversial field of science.

MEDIA

Women Behind the Headlines
Journalists from Mediterranean countries aim to change the status of women in the media and break through to higher positions.

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Soccer mania is with us, and there is little choice but to join the craze, bow to it or flee.

Colleagues, friends, newspapers and of course television are sparing us no detail. Obviously there are the 64 games, not to mention the hype leading up to these, from the speculation on the make-up of teams, taking into account Jack’s pulled muscle, Jo’s stomach upset or how Gene moves about on a wet field, followed by the string of post-game commentaries (why we won, why we lost, the role of Jack’s pulled muscle or Jo’s stomach upset).

Soccerphobes can pester all they want, but in vain, for there’s no saving grace, except perhaps the refuge of a few unassailable bunkers: a book that’s never been opened, a stroll during one of the big games through the wonderfully deserted streets, or the satisfaction of meeting with a few other soccerphobes to discover the small joys of those freedoms opened up by soccer mania.

Fans in front of the screen – 300 million worldwide –, along with Sunday players and all those enamoured with the sheer beauty of moves they’ve attempted thousands of times and succeeded in pulling off on a few rare occasions have every opportunity to go into trance as they see how their idols have managed to execute them automatically through sheer talent, knowledge of the game but also hard training.

The mood is in fact so festive that screen fans are taking little notice of besieged stadiums or chauvinistic overspills. Nor can they even hear the powerful roar of the engine driving this whole operation: the cash machine.

Marketing cracks have calculated that the turnover of drinks and snacks consumed by TV viewers during the games will be around 70 billion dollars (more or less the GNP of Portugal or Malaysia).

In short, the best and the worst of worlds are combined – the ins and the outs, idols and anonymous crowds, laughter and tears, dreams and nightmares, fraternity and division, sports and the entertainment industry, mass media and mass money – but pushed to extremes by the universal nature of the event. So turns the soccer-planet for one month. Better or worse than the same planet before or after?

We can at least make one wish: that the best wins. Not the strongest, not the one who wipes out his opponent, but the most astute one who knows how to play it all out, just like in a game.

René Lefort
In the first ever conducted international survey on children and media violence, a UNESCO study underlines television’s dominant role in the lives of youth around the world and its impact on the development of aggressive behaviour, paving the way for a stronger debate between politicians, producers, teachers and parents.

How do the world’s children spend most of their leisure time? The answer — watching television — may come as no great surprise, but the UNESCO Global Media Violence Study (see box p. 5), the largest-ever intercultural project on this topic, sheds light on the striking similarities of television’s impact in vastly different cultural, economic and social contexts.

In the areas surveyed, from relatively peaceful environments like Canada or certain high-crime neighbourhoods in Brazil to war-zones in Angola or Tajikistan, the study confirmed the dominant role of television in the everyday lives of children around the globe: 93% of the students who attend school and live in electrified urban or rural areas have regular access to television and watch it for an average of three hours a day. This represents at least 50% more than the time spent on any other out-of-school activity, including homework, being with friends, or reading. The result justifies the assumption that television is the most powerful source of information and entertainment besides face-to-face interaction.

With the advent of mass media, including television and more recently, video and computer games, children and teenagers are exposed to increasingly higher doses of aggressive images. In many countries, there is an average of five to ten aggressive acts per hour of television. Violence among youth is also on the rise, making it plausible to correlate the two, even though we believe that the primary causes for aggressive behaviour in children are to be found in their family environment, and the social and economic conditions in which they are raised.

Nonetheless, media plays a major role in the development of cultural orientations, world views and beliefs. Most studies show that the relation between media violence and “real” violence is interactive: media can contribute to an aggressive culture; people who are already aggressive use the media as further confirmation of their beliefs and attitudes, which, in turn, are reinforced through media content. As the basis for this study, we formulated the compass theory. Depending on a child’s already existing experiences, values and the cultural environment, media content offers an orientation, a frame of reference which determines the direction of one’s own behaviour. Viewers do not necessarily adapt what they have observed, but they measure their own behaviour in terms of distance to the perceived media models. For instance, if cruelty is “common”, “just” kicking the other seems to be innocent by comparison if the cultural environment has not established an alternative frame of reference.

Media heroes

Answers to a standardized set of 60 questions inquiring upon media behaviour, habits, preferences and social environments showed a fascination with aggressive media heroes, especially among boys: Arnold Schwarzenegger’s “Terminator” is a global icon, known by 88% of the children surveyed, be they from India, Brazil or Japan. Asked to name their favorite role models, boys most frequently named an action hero (30%), while girls opted for popstars. There are regional differences: Asia showed the highest ranking for the former (34%), Africa the lowest (18%), with
Europe and the Americas in between (25%). More interesting is how children in difficult situations identify with such heroes, whether as compensation or as an escape: 51% of the children from war or high-crime environments wish to be like him, as compared to 37% in the low-aggression neighbourhoods.

Overlapping worlds
A remarkable number of children from both groups (44%) report a strong overlap in what they perceive as reality and what they see on the screen. Many children are surrounded by an environment where “real” and media experiences both support the view that violence is natural. Close to one-third of the group living in high-aggression environments think that most people in the world are evil, a perception reinforced by media content. The impact of media violence can primarily be explained by the fact that aggressive behaviour is more systematically rewarded than more conciliatory ways of coping with one’s life. It is often presented as gratuitous, thrilling, and interpreted as a good problem-solver in a variety of situations. Contrary to the case of many novels or more sophisticated movies, media violence is often not set in a context. For children living in more stable environments, it offers a “thrill”: nearly half of the children who prefer aggressive media content (as compared to 19% with another media preference) express the desire to be involved in a risky situation. This holds particularly true for boys and tends to increase the more advanced the technological environment.

Violence has always been an ingredient of children’s adventure and suspense-movies, what is critical is the dominance and extreme it has reached. Furthermore, as the media becomes even more perfect with the introduction of three dimensions (virtual reality) and interactivity (computer games and multimedia), the representation of violence “merges” increasingly with reality. Censorship is not the adequate answer. Instead, codes of conduct and self-control must be developed among media professionals. Debate must be fostered between politicians, producers and teachers to find a common ground. Most importantly, media education must be furthered to create competent and critical media users, themes explored in this dossier.

Professor Jo Groebel
University of Utrecht

Everybody's In This

The debate over media violence has been described as paralyzingly complex. In the words of Keith Spicer, media specialist and former president of the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC): “People are always looking for a magic wand, when there are 30 to 40 elements involved.”

Since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, the momentum behind discussion has been reinforced by the introduction of cable and satellite television which means that many householders can now choose between 10, 20 or even more channels. Key events during a decade of debate include the presenting of the Children’s Television Charter by Anna Home (then head of children’s programmes for BBC television), to the first World Summit on Children and Television in Melbourne, Australia, in 1995. The Charter, which says children should have good quality programmes that do not exploit them, has become a policy reference for many countries. The SADC community of Southern African Developing Countries committed to the Charter in mid-1996. Shortly afterwards, The Asian Declaration on Child Rights and the Media was signed by government ministers and industry professionals from 16 Asian countries in Manila, the Philippines. The first all Africa summit on Children’s broadcasting was held in Accra, Ghana last year.

The Study
From 1996 to 1997, more than 5,000 12-year-old students from 23 countries (Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Croatia, Egypt, Fiji, Germany, India, Japan, Mauritius, the Netherlands, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, South Africa, Spain, Tajikistan, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine) answered a standardized 60-item questionnaire. Regional pre-tests assured that the children understood the questionnaire, which they filled in during classes. Out-of-school children or groups living in extremely remote areas could not be covered.

The study aimed to understand the role of the media in the lives of children; children’s fascination for media violence; the relationship between media violence and aggressive behaviour among children; the cultural and gender differences in the media impact on aggression; and how violent environments (war/crime) and the level of technological development influence the coping with aggressive media content. The study was conducted under Dr Jo Groebel of Utrecht University, with the World Organization of the Scout Movement accepting overall responsibility for the field work through their international network.
Canadians have witnessed a particularly intense debate this decade. It was spurred on by 14-year-old Virginie Larivière, who in 1992, launched a petition against violence on the screen. She gathered one-and-a-half million signatures and convinced the then prime minister Brian Mulroney to sign up. Larivière believed television violence had inspired the robbing, rape and brutal murder of her 11-year-old sister. "Hers was the most important act in terms of public education," says Spicer. "It strengthened our case with the industry because we could show that the public was demanding the debate."

The outcome was the Action Group on Violence in Television which announced a General Statement of Principles to be adhered to by all industry sectors. Other developments included media education on a massive scale and support for the V-chip invention which led to its manufacture and distribution.

To chip or not to chip

The "V-chip" is a microchip which can be incorporated in a television set, cable selector or decoder. It can be programmed at certain levels to block the reception of images which have been digitally classified according to their level of violence. This means the viewer can programme the V-chip to exclude all shows that exceed the level considered acceptable. For example, if the viewer selects level 3, then those above it will not appear on the screen. All new TV sets in the US now have the chip built into their circuits. The European Parliament last year put forward an amendment which would have required European TV manufacturers to follow suit, but the proposal was dumped in favour of more study.

While in Europe many in the media industry have frowned on the chip as a censorship device, Professor George Gerbner at Temple University, Philadelphia, claims that far from being a hindrance, the chip acts as a cover for the industry. "It's like the major polluters saying 'we shall continue our profitable discharge into the common cultural environment, but don't worry we'll also sell you gas masks to protect your children and have a free choice!' Besides the cynical ploy that it really is, the evidence is that very few parents know or use the V-chip."

Changing focus

For Choy Arnaldo, UNESCO's Chief of Free Flow of Information and Communications Research, the V-chip intrudes on private territory: "The chip tries to substitute for parental responsibility and in fact, it wouldn't take any 12-year-old long to figure out how to reprogramme it or even pull it out of the television altogether, so I don't really see this device as a solution. Chips don't raise children."

The debate must take into account research indicating that children from Tokyo to London are watching TV beyond the viewing times designated for them (a demarcation known as 'watershed' by the industry). In Britain, a study found that the 'watershed' was widely ignored.

The V-chip at least has the merit of stimulating debate on the control of contentious information. According to Luis Albornoz at the University of Buenos Aires, the V-chip's arrival has been a factor in private television stations last year deciding to stop broadcasting film trailers with violent images during the child protection time period (8am - 10pm). The Argentine Association of Radio and Television Broadcasting stations has also adopted a ratings system for films outside that period. "We might wonder," Albornoz comments, "if this new regulation will prove effective in modifying a television reality in which viewer-ratings and lack of responsibility prevail, and in which audio-visual products are seen as mere marketing techniques to sell other products, and not as cultural assets which can and should be at our children's service."

Anna Home, chief executive of the Children's Film and Television Foundation and
It's much more difficult to make humourous programmes.

SCREEN VIOLENCE
FROM A TO Z

In reaction to the debate about violence on the screen, UNESCO and the Swedish National Commission for UNESCO set up an international observatory in cooperation with the Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research (Nordicom). The clearing-house was launched in February, 1997. It includes a Nordicom research team attached to the University of Goteborg. The clearing-house’s mission - in the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - is to gather, analyze, and disseminate all information on children, young people and media violence. Data of every kind in this field is made available to users worldwide. The clearing-house 1998 yearbook contains a wealth of articles by distinguished scholars along with related references.

Decoding images

Banishing violence from the media is impossible. Monitoring, censorship, blacklisting or filter devices only seem to have the opposite effect. So people have to be educated, while bearing in mind that violence has always been an integral part of human interaction.

Educating children means “teaching them to understand what they see by having them create their own television images,” says French psychologist Serge Tisseron. It means encouraging them to be demanding towards the media “by providing them with critical tools and guiding them in their use,” according to Elisabeth Auclaire, head of the GRem (Research Group on Relations between Children and the Media), speaking at the International Forum on Youth and the Media Tomorrow, organized by GRem and UNESCO in Paris in April 1997.

They will then be equipped to distance themselves and to avoid being dominated by what they are seeing. Such domination led 29 young Americans, aged between 8 and 13, to shoot themselves in the head after seeing a scene of Russian roulette in the 1978 film “The Deer Hunter”.

“Grey areas”

Children should also learn to refuse to do what French sociologist Jean-Louis Missika calls “going along with and legitimizing” the gratuitous display of violence which can make it seem normal. Such violence can be in fictional material, cartoon films, or in programmes which glorify violence, such as “Crime Time, Prime Time,” one of America’s most popular TV shows. In 1993, the show had as a guest mass murderer Jeffrey Dahmer, who dissolved the bodies of 17 young...
black men in acid baths. Dahmer said he had “met God” in prison, talked of his wish to die and generally gave the impression of a worthy, almost heroic young man, if a shade confused. The results of such shows? The newspapers carried a report some time later of a 16-year-old boy accused of disembowelling a five-year-old girl. He said he was an admirer of Dahmer.

What matters is what children make of the media, especially in the “grey” areas, where the line between reality and non-reality is not clear. Programmes about parapsychology and the supernatural, for example, give the impression that it exists, or that it could exist. It is not like being frightened by a ghost which you know doesn’t exist, but of events and situations which sow doubt. “Letting children see such things without giving them any balancing view could leave the door open to religious sects,” warns Auclaire. Similarly, the Gulf War was portrayed on television news like some kind of video game, out of context and without explanation. “Kids were so wide-eyed at the accuracy of the firing and the high number of targets hit that they had to be reminded there were people at the receiving end of the shooting, not necessarily bad-guys, and that it wasn’t all a game,” she adds.

**Critical awareness**

Education through developing a critical attitude is starting to be included in school curricula. But it isn’t always welcomed. In Argentina, in the 1980s, many teachers regarded the media as an evil influence which children had to be protected from. On the other hand, in France, an organization called APTE (Audiovisual for All in Education) offers to teach children, from kindergarten to high school, this approach to what they see, to understand how images are made and their relationship to reality. Later, “this new awareness gives children the desire to share their new knowledge with adults,” says Dominik Picout, an APTE official. In Portugal, according to Manuel Pinto and Sara Pereira of Minho University, the media was often used as “a supplement to teaching,” but now the aim is more to understand its social function by encouraging children to be critical and demanding from a moral, social and aesthetic standpoint. Analytical tools are created to look at what the media does as a mirror and children are given a chance to set up their own media in workshops.

In Spain, they call it “developing visual skills among television viewers,” says J.M. Perez Tornero, author of a book called ‘The Educational Challenge of Television,’ published in Barcelona. Unlike reading or writing, which is learned by simple repetition, watching television does not give the viewer any greater ability to interpret its messages and techniques. “Educating viewers means making them active instead of passive,” says Jose Ignacio Aguaded Gomez, of the Andalusian teaching organization ‘Press and Education’ at Spain’s Huelva University. It means “they watch but can also use language to express their own feelings and discover how audiovisual language works.”

Children can then become “informed users of the media and contribute in a positive way to developing a democratic way of life,” says Choy Arnaldo, of UNESCO’s communications division. But, Auclaire warns, “you mustn’t demoralize children.” So the question should rather be: what positive part can the media play in educating them? An experiment in Brazil showed that children
considered analysis and thinking a “very important” part of their education. Maria Luiza Bellani of the Federal University of Santa Catarina found the children also better understood their own relationship to the violence they saw on television and realized “the contradiction between their taste for it and their reasoned condemnation of violence in real life.” This critical awareness was much sharper among poorer youth who “automatically mistrusted what was said on television.”

Another method might be to hold public discussions. This was advocated by Bertrand Tavernier when his film “L’Appât” (The Bait) — a particularly violent story of three youths who become killers — was shown on French television in March 1998. He said fiction could be instructive in an organized discussion. This assumes that the media are sufficiently enlightened to provide for such a two-way exchange, that the TV network bosses would agree to accept criticism and make any changes of style which might be thought necessary. That they would forget about ratings wars and resume their vital social role as messengers.

Cristina L’Homme

Media Education
Best Practices

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is not just a treaty for governments to implement. In fact, several of its provisions have direct application to broadcasters. The Convention states that children have the right to express their views, obtain information and make ideas or information known, regardless of frontiers. It also calls on signatories to ensure that “the child has access to information from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.” Here are some examples of ways in which different organizations are tackling media education.

Global: The International Children’s Day of Broadcasting (14 December). Organized by UNICEF, more than 2,000 broadcasters from 170 countries now participate in this event. Many participating broadcasters have trained children to produce their own programmes and make documentaries on violations of children’s rights.

Argentina: kick-started by UNESCO with a grant of $10,000 a decade ago, the Coordination Centre for Journalism, Communication and Education has organized more than 300 workshops in 200 schools on media skills. Run by Silvia Bacher and working in cooperation with the City Council of Buenos Aires, the centre favours schools in poor areas. The result is that several thousand young people now know how to prepare newspaper articles, make a radio or TV programme and shoot a video.

Brazil: the Telespectator’s Educational Programme offers school teachers practical materials to help them guide 10 to 16 year olds in discussing television and its messages. The project is run by the University of Brazil and the International Centre for Childhood and the Family. Pupils read texts and watch videos provided in teaching “kits” and carry out proposed activities such as writing poems or creating a play. The first “kits”, produced in 1992 were a sell-out, leading to a second edition in 1995.

Senegal: Radio Gune-Yi, which means youth in Wolof, is a production team which makes a 50 minute weekly programme broadcast by children for children. Recorded in villages around the country, the format includes a “Young Reporter” spot with a child reporting on his or her village. Another segment “Listen, I’ve Got Something to Say” features a young person’s message to parents, teachers or politicians. The show is broadcast weekly on national radio.

© UNICEF/LEMOYNE
A new wind is blowing in Africa. The cries of alarm heard throughout the 1980s have given way to a pragmatism and action that is firmly rooted in optimism. This new attitude flavoured the Seventh Conference of Ministers of Education of African Member States (MINEDAF VII), held in Durban (Republic of South Africa) from April 20-24. The 53 participating countries “went beyond the traditional lamentations over budgetary deficiencies” stresses the conference report, and concentrated on the gains made and achievements possible with existing means. At the last MINEDAF meeting (Dakar, 1991), observations of Africa’s “multifaceted crisis”, “the burden of debt”, and the “disquieting situation” in the education sector” set the tone. MINEDAF VII, however, focused on “history’s crucial turning point”, on the “African renaissance”, and affirmed that “the difficult problems can be overcome.”

This change in perspective is a major turnaround. But Africans today want rather to see the bottle half full rather than half empty. The official conference documents thus highlight the “commendable efforts made (…) since MINEDAF I in 1961” and especially, since the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien (Thailand, 1990).

**A progress in figures**

True, the decline in enrolment witnessed during the 1980s has been reversed in many countries: 78% of children are enrolled in primary school, and in one third of countries the percentage is over 90%. “Over the past few years, eight African countries have achieved primary education more or less for everybody, including poor countries such as Rwanda and Malawi,” said UNICEF’s Fay King Chung. Progress made at secondary level is no less than remarkable, with 32% of children enrolled. And the number of higher education students climbed from 1.5 million in 1980 to four million in 1995.

However major difficulties remain, caused mainly by high population growth. “One third of countries in Africa do not have enough places to enrol all school children and between 1985 and 1995 primary enrolment decreased in 17 countries,” signaled Elena Makonnen, a senior programme officer of the Economic Commission of Africa. In Cameroon, the economic crisis and structural adjustment have been blamed for the drop in school enrolment from 101% (1) to 87% between 1992 and 1994. “In Liberia, children were out of school for seven years during the
war,” said that country’s education minister, Dr Evelyn Kandakai, adding that “the level of school population is now below 50%”

Children must often travel several kilometres to attend school and “some children spend whole days without a meal” said a Ugandan teachers’ representative. On top of this, and as a result of crowded classrooms and a lack of teaching materials, repetition rates tend to be high, varying from 15-20% at primary level and affecting one third of pupils in countries such as Congo, Mali, Chad and Mauritania. Added to these difficulties, many children are being brought up in a predominantly illiterate environment (33% of men and 54% of women cannot read or write).

Numerous initiatives have been launched in recent years to overcome these problems. Efforts are being made to make education more relevant for children. Local or “home” languages are increasingly used, especially for children in rural zones, such as in Mali, Côte d’Ivoire or Angola, where “results have been extraordinary” said education minister Antonio da Silva. More globally, “Africanization” is also being felt in education content, and the rising sense of identity being experienced across Africa. New emphasis is also being placed on “know-how” and “life skills” such as AIDS prevention, contraception, and environmental protection, which are seen as increasingly necessary and a means of reinforcing the link between school and the child’s home and community.

**Gender gap**

There has also been a major push to get more girls into school, a move which has been constantly encouraged by UNESCO; the recruitment of more female teachers has considerably helped the situation. In primary schools, almost one teacher in two is now a woman, while at secondary level more than one in three teachers is female. “We know parents are hesitant to send girls to schools in areas where there are few women teachers,” explained Aline Bory-Adams of UNICEF. At primary level, 45% of pupils are girls, and at secondary level the percentage has climbed from 27% in 1988 to 38% today. “Despite laws and policies, there is still a gender gap because of our culture”, said Francis Babu, Uganda’s education minister. “Even I was brought up in a culture where boys were not allowed to go into the kitchen.”

While “education for all” remains the long term goal, policies are now concentrating on priority areas, including rural children, girls, and relevance, in a bid to obtain concrete, if limited results. This pragmatism arises partly from the growing desire of Africans to work out their own solutions; to break the cycle of dependence, especially financially. Hence, the quest for inexpensive educational innovations such as the establishment of alternative systems or the attempts to seek other funding sources (see following article). This pragmatism also reflects another big change. “In today’s Africa, education ministers are no longer simply politicians, they are education professionals. Many are teachers themselves,” explained Muhammad Musa, Director of the Bureau for Programme Co-ordination Africa in UNESCO’s Education Sector. “They participated in all the conference sessions, exchanged views, and went straight to the airport at the end of the meeting, without stopping for a shopping spree or to play tourist – which was previously unheard of!”

**A second struggle**

Almost 40 years after independence, the countries of Africa today have the managers, the experts, the men and women who want to bring to life what have been up until recently but lofty ambitions. Significantly, the conference did not end with the usual list of “recommendations”, but rather with a “statement of commitment” – short and to the point – that marks a break with the often soothing and generalizing conclusions frequently produced at such gatherings. The entire continent seems to have been galvanized by the democratic revolution of 1994 in South Africa – the last liberation struggle in Africa – and which was not chosen by chance as the host of MINEDAF VII. The facts and figures concerning Africa have not changed so much over the past few years, but the will for change has never been so strong. Africa is now going through, as Ahmed Haggag of the Organization for African Unity put it, a “second struggle for liberation – this time from ignorance and illiteracy.”

Nadia Khouri-Dagher, with Kathy Moloney in Durban

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(1) Enrollment rates, which measure the number of students against the number of school-age children at a particular stage of the education cycle, can exceed 100% when older students who have repeated or started late are included.
The financial environment is relatively stable today. What we need now is better management," concluded MINEDAF VII participants in their final report. The "new pragmatism" of Africa's education authorities is nowhere better reflected than in the approach now being taken to the critical question of funding.

This approach is based firmly on African realities, and a real desire for independence on the part of the political authorities, especially in the financial domain. In all countries, education already swallows the lion's share of public expenditure. Swinging between 15 and 20% of national spending, this rate, in almost all cases, represents a net increase since 1985. Given the heavy debt burden, it is unlikely to go any higher. Salaries – those of teachers and administrators – account for more than three quarters of education budgets and are considered fixed costs (see graph).

Back at the 1990 Jomtien Conference on Education for All, it was recommended that "new financial and human resources" be mobilized; the justification for this being that "time, energy and funding directed to basic education are perhaps the most profound investment in people and in the future of a country which can be made" then "all of society has a contribution to make."

"The post-independence notion of free and state-funded education does not work," said Mathias Mphande, the deputy education minister of Zambia. "Tax does not work because we are faced with structural adjustment and shrinking resources. The only solution is cost-sharing." Across the continent, state monopoly on education is coming to an end, even in the heavily centralized francophone countries. "There is no way we can expect governments to cater for all the educational needs; the private sector and communities should be involved," said Manadou Ndoyde, the education minister of Senegal.

The main concept to emerge from MINEDAF VII was of an expanded partnership. In Malawi, Zambia, Angola, Kenya and Uganda, for example, villagers are increasingly involved in the construction of new schools and classrooms. "In Mauritius, where education has been completely government-funded from the primary to the tertiary level (...), we are now encouraging the private sector to come on board," explains K. Chedumbarum Pillay, the education minister. Under the terms of "a unique deal struck between business and government, the private sector has agreed to fund and build new schools and colleges over 10 to 15 years. Once they are completed, the government will have another 10 to 15 years to pay business back." "In Rwanda (...) we have reduced taxes on building and school materials to a bare minimum to encourage private sector involvement," said the education minister, Dr. Joseph Karemera.

More generally, according to the meeting report, it was agreed that "funding should be concentrated on basic education, with the degree of cost-sharing being increased as the level rises." Higher education, for example, absorbs a considerable part of public education spending – 18% in Guinea and Mali, and 28% in Congo and Burundi – but accounts for only 3% of the continent's student population.

The privatization of education, as with other public services, is supported – and even imposed – by the IMF and the World Bank. There is no way we can expect governments to cater for all the educational needs.

"Education accounts for 15% to 20% of national spending."

© SIPA PRESS/ABRAMOVITZ
Bank within the framework of their structural adjustment programmes. The public education crisis and deregulation policies have seen the tendency to privatize rapidly accelerate since the 1980s, resulting sometimes in the creation of a new relatively well-off social class. At secondary level, the percentage of children enrolled in private institutions thus rose from 50% in 1985 to 74% in 1995 in Botswana, from 29% to 36% in Côte d’Ivoire, and 5% to 13% in Chad.

Cost-sharing however has its downside. When it was introduced in Kenya in 1993, during a period of strong economic growth, enrolment increased to 90%, explained that country’s education minister, Stephen Musyoka. “But when faced with drought and structural adjustment, enrolment dropped to 73%.”

If the idea of spreading education costs more broadly – especially for higher education which mainly benefits the better off – it needs to be recognized that privatization can also lead to a “two-speed education”. It can also, by favouring certain communities and religious bodies, threaten political stability.

The task ahead will be to find that delicate balance between economic realities, the demand for equality and the need to maintain a coherent nation-state.

N.K.-D. with Kathy Moloney in Durban.

South Africa: Compulsory, but far from free

Sitting in their dusty classroom in a township school, pupils write down line after line of text which is being copied by their teacher from a book onto the blackboard. It is time-consuming, but this is the only way the grade 10 class at Intshisekelo High – a school situated outside the city of Durban, South Africa – is going to cover the textbook. “We have received no textbooks,” said the teacher, Vusi Hlatshwayo. “The principal has had to dip into the meagre school fund so that at least teachers will have books. We have been told that the education department will give books to poor schools but all we have received so far are promises.” This is the stark reality that millions of pupils in South Africa are facing this year. The government has no money to buy textbooks for schools.

South Africa, like many of its African neighbours which have endured years of war and dictatorship, has just emerged from decades of apartheid. Educational reform had been one of the main platforms in the fight against apartheid and was one of the first areas to be tackled by the new government. Some months after Nelson Mandela took up the presidency in April 1994, education was made compulsory until the age of 14. The schools – once separating black, Indian, coloured and white pupils – became open to all races. Programmes were unified and textbooks, such as history, were revised.

A tough legacy

Although enrolment is almost 100%, “the social and economic impact of apartheid still remains,” said the country’s education minister, Sibusiso Bengu. Blacks make up 87% of the population, but during apartheid, black schools received less money than white schools: in 1993 the spending per black pupil was 1,440 rand ($288), against 4,700 rand ($940) for a white pupil. Today, of the country’s 27,000 schools, 60% are in need of major to minor repairs and do not have telephones, 83% do not have libraries.
Although enrolment is almost 100%, the social and economic impact of apartheid still remains.

24% do not have access to water, 52% do not have electricity, 12% do not have any form of sanitation. The number of pupils per class can reach 150 in rural schools. The result: last year, only 47% of matriculates passed and several schools had a matric pass of 0%.

Education is now compulsory, but certainly not free. To send a child to primary school now costs an average $100 a year, compared to $20 a few years ago. And to enrol at a good school is expensive: fees at a Durban public high school for example are $1000; university fees are in the realm of $2000, when an average worker’s monthly salary is $400 and more than 30% of the population is unemployed.

“A school funding document is about to be released which will ensure that the bulk of money will go to poor and disadvantaged schools (the poorest 40%),” said Bengu. The government has committed 21% of its budget to education but 85% is absorbed by the salaries of teachers and administrative staff. To cut spending, 13,000 teaching posts have been axed. Another 13,000 lay-offs are planned. “We need to make savings within the system so that we have enough money for the transformation of education,” said Bengu. The feeling on the ground is different. Several schools with up to 50 pupils per teacher have closed over recent months in protest at the cuts. South Africans, disappointed after campaign promises of “free and compulsory education for all” in the run up to the 1994 vote, could well make their protests heard via the ballot box in the national elections just a year away.

Kathy Moloney in Durban

Mali: short on funds, not on ideas

When they spoke up, it sounded like hip-hop or rap. Clipped, raw words echoed their washed-up young city-dwellers’ lives as they talked bluntly of their disappointments, problems and hopes to a UNESCO-sponsored workshop which brought officials from seven West African countries to the Malian capital of Bamako last December.

What they said described the situation better than the finest official speech:

Respect me, protect me,
consult me, don’t insult me,
I’m hungry and angry
and burning for learning
so listen to my warning:
I ain’t no fool, I know the rule,
it would be cool to be in school,
But I’m stamping my feet
outside in the street.

Despite having theoretically free primary education and being enthusiastic about literacy, Mali still faces huge problems which hold back its social, cultural and economic development. Yet despite meagre resources, solutions are emerging, cooperation between government and NGOs is on the rise and new and alternative approaches are showing results.

One example is the growth of village schools set up by determined local people and not tied to the state. The American NGO Save the Children launched a literacy campaign in 1987 at the request of the Malian government to tackle an urgent need for basic education in the Kolondieba region, which was seen as resistant to educational efforts.

The programme started in 1992. The villagers grasped the importance of schooling, plunged into it and now feel responsible for its success or failure. Everyone pitches in to make bricks and put up the school's
wooden building frame. The school is truly theirs. It meets their own needs, unlike the official education system.

Save the Children provides equipment (about $1,200 worth per school), trains the teachers and supplies textbooks in close coordination with government bodies. The emphasis is more on village life, health, work, arithmetic, and reading and writing in the local language. The timetable is synchronized with the farm work, the village’s main source of income. A special effort is made to coax parents into letting their daughters attend school. The girls still too often do household chores and schooling is seen as a loss of potential income for a family.

Between 1992 and 1997, the villagers of Kolondieba built a total of 165 classrooms in 128 villages, enabling 7,000 children, half of them girls, to go to school. In contrast, the government only managed to build 29 schools between 1955 and 1997. Truancy is now almost unknown.

However, the Malian government also launched a project in March 1994 to build 20 “education for development” centres, where the villagers are regarded as decision-makers to be given the means to run the educational system they want and devise. The same approach has been taken in the pre-school sector, where a nursery project, called locally “Den Ladamu So” (house of education for the child), was started in March 1997, in close association with UNESCO (see Sources no. 99). Malian women volunteers look after underprivileged children, using games, songs, stories and dances, to give a grounding which points them towards the educational system while respecting local traditions.

Community media

What better way to promote education than through the media? A campaign began in 1994 to get radio stations and newspapers to carry simple messages, interviews and sketches, all aimed at boosting school attendance (especially by girls), combating illiteracy and also the image of a school as something “alienating.” The press and the village libraries gather this material. Country people are thus made aware of the need to fight malaria, diarrhoea, bilharzia, and the use of polluted water from irrigation ditches.

The results show quickly. Public broadcasts and live debates about education followed by phone-ins revive village life. Neighbourhood sanitation committees are set up, roads repaired and ditches unclogged. People are encouraged with prizes and there are literary competitions for young people.

But though some things change, such as girls going to school, the traditional conservatives – some of the witch-doctors or villagers who mistake literacy for conversion to Christianity – do not entirely fade away. Farm work also has to be done at set times, which affects operation of the ill-equipped radio stations.

But despite the snags, education is advancing. Learning to read and write is act of liberation. Mali knows that, which is why this large rural country, one of the poorest and least educated in the world, is original about it. It is seeking other ways to educate, ones more suitable to local conditions, so as to open the way to education for those excluded up to now.

Cristina L’Homme

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**UNESCO and Education in Africa**

UNESCO allocates the largest part of its budget - one third - to education. Africa alone absorbs more than 30% of this share outside headquarters. The Priority Africa Programme, adopted in 1989, was designed to encourage cooperation, mobilize extra-budgetary resources and support inter-disciplinary and intersectoral activities. UNESCO is not a donor; it offers essentially technical assistance and expertise. It also provides policy advice to governments. In the field, UNESCO works closely with government ministers, NGOs, community associations, plus international and regional bodies.

**BASIC EDUCATION**

While basic education remains a key focus, UNESCO encourages an expanded vision of education. This means fostering skills for everyday life and work in addition to reading, writing and math. For example, in Ghana, Botswana and Nigeria, the environment is used for the teaching of science and other basic knowledge.

**GIRLS AND WOMEN**

Particular attention is paid to women and girls, especially in rural zones. UNESCO supports the education of female teachers, and the mobilization of communities to encourage girls to stay in school. There are national plans of action for school enrolment of girls in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Niger, Senegal and Mali.

Generally, the percentage of girls in schools has increased across the continent. UNESCO recommends the use of local languages for basic education. In East Africa, teachers are working from textbooks in Kiswahili. Relevance is also key: learning how to read and write becomes more attractive when linked to real-life benefits, especially in the case of adults. Zanzibar fishermen have manuals that help them improve their productivity and accounts management while learning to read.

The early years are critical for children: UNESCO is developing programmes for early childhood education through the training of specialized teachers.

**SEX EDUCATION**

Pregnancy forces many teenage girls to abandon their studies and adolescents are often the first affected by HIV/AIDS. UNESCO is working with the ministries of education and health and NGOs from 25 African countries to encourage the integration of sex education in the school curriculum.

**EMERGENCY**

In countries confronted by emergency situations, UNESCO supplies a Teacher’s Emergency Pack that provides the basic tools for teaching up to 80 pupils a day for a period of six months, as well as food aid, which is often synonymous with keeping underprivileged children in school.

N. K.-D.
RETURN TO ORIGIN

The return of four statues dating from the 6th century BC to Colombia was marked by a ceremony in Nantes (France) on April 23. The figures were stolen a decade ago from the San Agustin archaeological site in the southern department of Huila. They belong to the San Agustin and Tierradentro cultures which used the area for religious and funerary purposes. More than 300 statues have been identified on the 250-sq. km. site, which was added to the World Heritage list in 1995. The disappearance of the sculptures had been signalled by Interpol. Efforts by customs agents in the United States and France led to the objects being seized on their arrival in France.

Cultural Heritage and Armed Conflict

Experts moved ahead with the delicate task of revising the Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954) during a meeting held in Vienna from May 11 - 13. In designing a new instrument that would supplement the Convention, they advanced new elements for the text relating to military necessity, recommended the establishment of an intergovernmental committee, and examined provisions on jurisdiction over rules protecting offenders of cultural property. A revised text will go before a diplomatic conference, scheduled to take place in the Netherlands from March 9 - 16, 1999.

BETHLEHEM, 2,000 YEARS AFTER

Following a meeting on May 11-12 in Brussels (Belgium), donors pledged around $100 million for Bethlehem 2000. Launched by UNESCO, the project, which coincides with the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Christ, aims to safeguard the heritage of the Palestinian city and stimulate its economic development. More than 600 government officials and representatives of the private sector and of the different religious communities attended. In his address, Yasser Arafat expressed the hope that the project would "promote dialogue and strengthen relations and understanding among various peoples and cultures with the aim of paving the road towards peace in the region."

UNESCO’s cyber-gallery

No need to visit Paris to see art by Moore, Calder, Giacometti, Miro, Noguchi, Picasso housed at UNESCO’s headquarters. The organization’s web site now includes 17 works by these masters and others, displayed in the form of a gallery. Just click on “visit”, follow the instructions and a photograph plus a description of the selected art appears. A plan of UNESCO’s layout is also available, along with a history of the Headquarters, inaugurated 40 years ago. The presentation was done by three students from the Paris-based Institut français d’études supérieures des arts.

CULTURE OF PEACE

Concrete Proposals

“A culture of peace is the transition from the logic of force and fear to the logic of reason and love,” affirms the declaration adopted in Chisinau (Moldova) on 18 May at the outcome of an international forum organized by UNESCO. Attended by leading European intellectuals and academics, the forum highlighted the importance of education in operating the transition from today’s culture of war and violence to a civilization of peace and dialogue. In its Programme of Action, the forum emphasized the need to develop appropriate teaching aids and integrate courses on a culture of peace into all levels of schooling. It also emphasized the responsibility of the media in encouraging dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. The programme also stresses that scientific studies have a role to play in overcoming “intolerance, prejudices and stereotypes of the image of the enemy”.

PEACE BY WOMEN

A UNESCO seminar on “Women and a Culture of Peace in Burundi” gathered some 100 female participants in Bujumbura from April 21 to 25. The purpose: to give women from rural and urban backgrounds, coming from the country’s three ethnic groups and belonging to different women’s organizations, the opportunity to meet, talk together and define a common strategy for the promotion of a culture of peace. The seminar generated a number of recommendations for women’s groups, notably encouraging them to help victims of the crisis in Burundi to rebuild their homes and re-establish traditional values, emphasizing those favourable to peace.
**IN BRIEF**

IN BRIEF IN BRIEF IN BRIEF IN BRIEF

**PEOPLE**

**SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Democracy and Development

Fostering a democratic culture is the primary purpose of the International Panel on Democracy and Development, recently created by the Director-General. Among the themes it will focus on: education for democracy and citizenship, support for the consolidation of democratic processes, democratic processes in everyday life, the free flow of information and the development of pluralistic and independent media. Presided by the former United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros-Boutros Ghali of Egypt, the panel will be composed by some 20 eminent figures, including Robert Badinter, former president of the French Constitutional Council, Nadine Gordimer (South Africa), Nobel Prize for Literature, and Keba M'Baye (Senegal), former vice-president of the International Court of Justice.

**HUMAN KIND’S DUTIES**

The working group on a Universal Declaration on Human Rights and Responsibilities held its second meeting in Valencia (Spain) from April 28 to 30. Sponsored by UNESCO and presided by Judge Richard Goldstone (South Africa), the group moved ahead with its thinking on the limits of state sovereignty, the pertinence of a Hippocratic oath for scientists and media professionals, as well as security in the face of arms trafficking and drugs. Once finalized, the Declaration will be presented to UNESCO, which will decide whether it goes before the UN General Assembly.

**CHILDREN AT THE SUMMIT**

They arrived from Cuba, South Africa, Israel, Turkey, the United States and more: in all 600 children between the ages of 7 and 14 travelled from 51 countries to participate in the Children’s Summit, organized from May 4 to 8 by UNESCO and the Walt Disney Company. Based on the theme “Growing Up”, the event encouraged children to voice their concerns for the future through 18 workshops on education, children’s rights, nutrition, relationships and sports. The youngsters came up with a call to action named “Friendship: A Sun that Never Sets”, affirming that “We, the children of the world, want to live in peace”. “Here at UNESCO we build peace through education,” the Director-General Federico Mayor explained to them. “All children must have access to education... Help me so that education may be for all. This means peace,” he stated, pledging to communicate their call to the leaders of UNESCO’s 186 Member States.

**Interplanetary Navigator named Goodwill Ambassador**

appointed UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador on May 11 in recognition of his outstanding role in the Pathfinder mission dedicated to the exploration of the planet Mars as well as his “contribution to promoting science education in Africa.” Praising Mr Diarra’s scientific achievements, UNESCO Director-General Federico Mayor stated that “your life is a wonderful disavowal of all prejudice and constitutes an encouraging example for all children from a deprived background.”

**Also plenty to do on earth.**

Cheick Modibo Diarra, the Malian-born interplanetary navigator who led NASA’s Mars Observer mission, was awarded UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador on May 11 in recognition of his outstanding role in the Pathfinder mission dedicated to the exploration of the planet Mars as well as his “contribution to promoting science education in Africa.” Praising Mr Diarra’s scientific achievements, UNESCO Director-General Federico Mayor stated that “your life is a wonderful disavowal of all prejudice and constitutes an encouraging example for all children from a deprived background.”

“...So closely intertwined is the concept of press freedom with democracy that a leader must approach any attempt to impose even the most legal of limitations on it with great care,” declared Corazon C. Aquino, former president of the Philippines on May 3, World Press Freedom Day. As highlighted by the Director-General, Federico Mayor, “a people needs to be well-informed in order to assume its destiny, participate in the democratic functioning of its institutions and consolidate peace.”

“Spare a thought for those less fortunate than ourselves around the globe,” said Cushrow Irani, editor of The Statesman, Calcutta, “and let us so conduct ourselves as to give neither aid nor comfort to tyrants and despots and governments democratic in name but all too ready to menace freedom and threaten justice (...). In a very real sense, I am indeed my brother’s keeper.”

“I call on the Afghan people, in spite of the tragic period of history they are living, to protect their heritage. It is universal heritage and they will have to account for it to future generations,” stated the Director-General on May 5, after the collapse in April of the Minar-e-Chakari tower. Built over 1,600 years ago, the tower overlooked Kabul. Mr Mayor described the tower as an “exceptional testimony to the presence of the Buddhist religion in pre-Islamic Afghanistan. Its fall is an irreplaceable loss for the people of Afghanistan, who are losing a part of their cultural heritage, their historical memory and their identity.”
Solar energy
Because solar energy is recognized by many populations "as being in harmony with their cultural traditions (...), sustainable energy, with its peaceful, participatory, and environmentally friendly associations, seems poised to repair the long-standing divorce between science and culture," writes the Director-General Federico Mayor in the preface to this work published within the framework of the World Solar Programme 1996-2005.

Beautifully illustrated, it describes the many different forms of energy from the sun, "the one energy source that sustains and links all life", arguing that "sustainable solar energy seems poised to become the principal energy of the future."

Korean Short Stories
This anthology of short stories by some of modern Korea's best known writers reflects a rich variety of style and content. Manifest in these pages is a shared experience of Korea's trajectory from inward-looking feudal Confucian society, to the Japanese colony culminating in the Pacific War, to battleground of the Korean War, to a modernizing society that is struggling with economic success and democratization. For the English reader, this is a rare opportunity to experience the world of 20th century Korea through its literature. A short biography on each author prefaces their stories, personalizing the work and providing added context.

Central Asian History
During the eight centuries covered in this volume (the first part of vol. IV), the new faith of Islam gradually spread eastwards and northwards from Arabia, reaching much of Central Asia, the southern fringes of Siberia and the eastern regions of China. During this period, nomadic and military empires arose in the heart of Asia, impinging on the history of adjacent, well-established civilizations and cultures like China and India. Although the region had always absorbed influences from surrounding civilizations, Lamaist Buddhism eventually established itself in the Mongolian region and in Tibet.

TRANS-SAHARAN TRADE
I do not wish to underestimate the importance of the trans-Atlantic slave trade - or the West's responsibility (clearly outlined in the map presented in Sources No.99). However, neither should we underestimate the importance of the overland slave routes, which date back much further (from the Egyptians to the Romans) and along which slave trading continues even today (between North and South Sudan). Islam's expansion towards black Africa was due in part to slavery. During the last century, various kingdoms made a living out of the annual trade undertaken during the dry season in the "land of the pagans" - better known today as the Central African Republic. More than 10 years after the arrival of Europeans in eastern Central Africa, slave raids were still being attempted. Having spent 20 years criss-crossing this country, I can bear witness to the fact that despite adequate rainfall, the east is a veritable human desert, with less than 50,000 inhabitants per 250,000 sq.km. Yet there is plenty of evidence - the ruins of villages, pottery shards and the like - to show that this region was well populated last century. African writer Etienne Goyémide, dared break the taboo in his book 'Le dernier survivant de la caravane' ('The Last Survivor of the Caravan'), but nonetheless two important words were never mentioned: Arab and Islam.

Yves Boulvert
Director of Research
French Scientific Research Institute for development and Cooperation (ORSTOM)
Centre de Bondy (France)
The Slave Route project focuses on the transatlantic trade. However the trans-Saharan trade also has its place, with a number of seminars on the role of religion in the slave trade being organized (Ed.).
EXHIBITIONS

SPECIAL TOYS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS
Designing toys for handicapped children and sharing this knowledge with educators is the aim of the German association “Stimulation through play”. In partnership with the UNESCO Programme for the Education of Children in Need, models of wood and cloth toys were displayed at Headquarters from April 22 to 30. Easy for parents and teachers to make, the toys stimulate creativity and develop the child’s senses. The association, which also organizes seminars and workshops, has published several illustrated books on how to make these toys.

The Bolshoi and UNESCO
Tchaikovsky’s baton, the costume worn by Chaliapine in Mussorgsky’s opera Boris Godunov, lithographs, photos, set models and videos on this history of the Bolshoi were on view at UNESCO from April 27 to May 7. Since its founding in the 18th century, the venerable Russian theatre has undergone several facelifts over the years, but it’s now in serious need of a full-fledged overhaul at a time when state subsidies are dwindling. UNESCO vowed to join in the effort and plans to launch an awareness campaign to mobilize funds. The exhibit was a fine way of rallying dance and music lovers to the cause.

TRADITION AND DIVERSITY
I would like to draw attention to certain omissions in the article entitled ‘A Walk on the Wild Side’ (N° 99). The one million Irish who died of starvation, and the five million others who left the country during the great potato famine of the 1840s, would certainly have been able to survive had their tradition not prevented them from eating fish and shellfish in abundant supply on the coast. It would perhaps be useful to recall that there are good and bad traditions.

André Pilet, Sales agent
Amfreville-sous-les-Monts
(France)

The article in question does not promote the consumption of traditional foods, but rather the diversification of crops. It should also be remembered that in pre-industrial Ireland lack of infrastructure meant that only coastal inhabitants had ready access to fish. Apart from this, potatoes were introduced into Ireland during the century preceding the famine and could not really be considered a “traditional” food. And then, the country and its economy were submitted to colonial rule at the time...

(Ed.)

Prisoners and ex-inmates express their thoughts on delinquency, a “curable disease”. Reintegration is referred to by one of them as “a term that should be added to the list of empty, meaningless words.” Away from its central theme, The Courier presents an interview with American choreographer Susan Buirge who discusses her ideas on dance.

THE UNESCO COURIER
“What can be done to improve the penal system?” asks the June issue which headlines: “Prisons, a system in crisis”. “Modern society still finds it necessary to respond to crime with punishment. The retributive character of penal measures stems directly from the nature of the apparatus used to fight crime,” writes Brazilian professor Edmundo Oliveira. “Prison causes more ethical, social, psychological and economic problems than it solves.” Apart from the specialists’ point of view on the prison problem, possible solutions such as privatization, substitute penalties, opportunities to make amends and electronic surveillance at home are canvassed.

PROSPECTS
“What were the priorities during your term in office and how were they defined? What were your relations with various sectors involved in educational change? What lessons did you learn from your experience?” These questions were put to some ten present and former education ministers. Their answers are analyzed in issue No. 104 of Prospects, entitled “Educational Reform: The Decision Maker’s Approach”. Despite different contexts, there was a consensus on the need to establish closer links between education, work and a social vision through dialogue.

Copyright Bulletin
Does the downloading from the internet and safeguarding of a scientific article constitute the reproduction of material subject to copyright law? An article in Copyright Bulletin No. 1, 1998, “Intellectual property and global information infrastructure” by André Lucas continues the debate over the legal conundrums posed by the digital environment. The issue also includes an annual review of States party to the international conventions on intellectual property adopted under the auspices of UNESCO.

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AN UPLIFT FOR THE VALLEY

EDUCATION A small revolution is underway in isolated villages of Morocco’s High Atlas mountains, where an association is helping locals find the tools for change.

About 50 kms southwest of Marrakesh, the Imlil Valley brings you right to the foot of Mount Toubkal, the highest point of the High Atlas mountains and indeed of North Africa itself. As everywhere in Morocco, when the road turns into a track, the local inhabitants are cut off from the outside world, with only their crops and their herds for sustenance and not even a minimal social infrastructure. Between Asni and Imlil – the only places with electricity – there are 25 or so villages which have only five schools and two clinics in all and not a drop of clean water.

FILLING A GAP

This is where AMRASH (the Moroccan Association for Research and Action in Health and Hygiene) has sponsored a variety of self-help projects over the past decade, most recently with a boost of $45,000 from UNESCO. The aim is to raise awareness of problems and do something about them, so as to make life a bit better for the weakest and poorest, mainly women, children and young people.

The association was founded by a paediatrician, Dr Leila Tazi, who has recruited a group of doctors, sociologists, business people and bankers sharing a belief in solidarity and community help. “I set up AMRASH because I thought the knowledge and skills that drive development were not sufficiently available,” she says. “Forty percent of Moroccans living in the countryside have no access to health care and the mortality rate for children and their mothers is reaching alarming levels.”

She cites the gaps in the national campaign against diarrhoea-related diseases which she was involved in. “The art of planning, which fascinated me because of its realistic approach, is based on ‘profitability’ and ‘feasibility.’ The day I applied those criteria to the number of dead children and young women, I had a problem with my conscience.”

AMRASH operates through a programme called SEVES, an acronym which, in French, sums up the association’s activities – solidarity, community help, village, education, water, electrification and health. The approach is based on an in-depth study of the project site and on getting villagers and local authorities involved.

“Needs are very great but we do nothing without the support and input of all the people in a village and their willingness to take part. We discuss things with the men and women of the valley for as long as necessary so that they themselves decide what we can all achieve together,” says Tazi.

A minor revolution has begun in the village of Agersioual through its new SEVES community centre. It was built along traditional lines by the villagers and has two storeys, with a kitchen upstairs and three rooms which can be turned into a rural guest house for the foreign tourists and trekkers who visit the area. Downstairs is a classroom, a small crafts museum, a library and a sewing room. The centre also has solar-generated electricity and a septic tank. The water from it irrigates an orchard in the grounds. The villagers are alert to environmental questions and are currently discussing with AMRASH an extensive drainage and water supply project for the whole village.

NEW OPENINGS

Mornings at the centre are taken up with lessons in Arabic and French for young illiterate adults, mainly girls and mothers as well as children too old to go to school. The library and the small museum are rather symbolic, but are very important as a cultural focus and vital backup for education. The sewing and knitting room has quickly turned into a centre for income-generating activities by the women. Setting up a production co-operative is being looked into. “The centre has changed our lives,” say the young villagers.

“We've got everything to gain from it. We're learning to read and write. We can earn some money with the sewing and knitting, not much but enough to pay the teacher.”

Harder to measure is the feeling of pride and independence the young women are gradually developing. “Now we're equipped to talk with people from outside
the village, and even with our fathers,” they say. “We’ve changed a lot. When we go into town (Marrakesh), at least we can find our way, read the street signs and make a phone call without having to ask someone to do it for us.”

Some of the women have become instructors in other villages, helping to develop income-generating activities there. The association hopes to build SEVES community centres in a score of other villages over the next two years. In Asni, near the valley villages, a training centre with a library and media resources unit is being built for educators working in a range of fields, from literacy and health to renewable energy.

Many link-ups are being made, including one with the “barefoot college” of Tilonia, in Rajasthan, India. Three young people from Aquersioual, including a shepherd who has never been to school, are in India at the moment being trained at the college in solar power generation. To train teachers, AMRASH is working with the French organization “Education Nouvelle.”

SOLIDARITY FIRST

“AMRASH is a collection of countless little networks exchanging and sharing knowledge and skills, between the young people of one village, between two villages, between countries, between North and South, between South and South,” says Tazi. The association also works with the Moroccan ministry of education and the literacy office.

Is she nostalgic about the time she was a lecturer at the faculty of medicine in Casablanca? Does she regret turning down a job with the World Health Organization in Alexandria? “People criticize me for abandoning medicine,” says Tazi, who created the infectious diseases unit at the children’s section of the Casablanca university hospital. “But working for a state-run organization isn’t the same as serving the public. The university isn’t a place where you can express yourself, work in accordance with your beliefs, be inquisitive or use your imagination. I have a broader vision of health.”

Tazi now divides her time between the AMRASH office in Casablanca and frequent visits to the villages in the Imlil valley. Her mission is not without its rewards: “When I send a little girl to school or encourage a sense of solidarity among a group of young girls, I feel more of a paediatrician and a doctor than I was before. I really believe that knowledge, solidarity and a creative view of the world are among a human being’s vital functions too.”

Keltoum Ghazali in the Imlil Valley, Morocco

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**SCIENCE**

A debate on biotechnologies highlights the tremendous hopes and fears sparked by one of the most controversial fields of knowledge.

**TOWARDS A BRAVE NEW WORLD?**

To those who equate biotechnologies with modern science, the French geneticist Axel Kahn counters with a sweeping journey through time: “In 6,000 BC in Egypt, man fermented micro-organisms and obtained an alcoholic beverage, beer. In 5,000 BC, he created a vegetable monster, wheat, by cross-breeding three genomes of different sub-species.” These milestones marked the real birth of biotechnologies stated Kahn, opening a debate organized at UNESCO on May 18 on the theme “Biotechnologies: Towards a Brave New World?” as part of the 21st Century Talk Series.

Placing the debate in a historical perspective, Kahn, director of research at the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research, warned that the fears and expectations aroused by biotechnologies have existed since the beginning of time. They are entwined with ancient myths, prejudices and aspirations. With the advent of genetic engineering, the border between myth and reality appears increasingly blurred. Is the molecular geneticist to be equated with the magician who could transform a pumpkin into a carriage, or again, with an ancient soothsayer, now able to read the future with powerful genetic tools? “The molecular geneticist who teaches a bacteria how to make human insulin, an anti-hemophile agent or a growth hormone is without doubt a magician, but should he necessarily be feared?” asked Kahn.

**THE RIGHT QUESTIONS**

Drawing attention to the lack of nuance that characterizes the debate, Kahn argued that in the case of transgenic plants, the right questions were not being asked. “To ask whether a transgenic plant is dangerous makes no sense. It’s like wondering whether a vegetal plant is dangerous: the tomato isn’t, hemlock is.” Are these plants dangerous for the environment? “For two to three centuries, colonial powers brought back exotic plants and transplanted them on their territory without knowing anything about the environment. The molecular geneticist is probably much less uncertain about what he is doing than the selector who cross-bred species at random to make wheat. Genetic engineering should be seen as one manner of apprehending a problem that man has pursued over time: to improve the variety and quality of plant species.”

Categorically condemning human cloning, Kahn pointed out that science and technology are not morals in and of themselves, but warned of the appropriation of science to support prejudices and construct full-fledged ideologies such as racism. “The geneticist’s work is
not over when he obtains an excellent result or discovers a law of nature. He is a particularly engaged citizen because he knows how certain ideologies that stigmatize and exclude others would like to use the knowledge that science brings to light. The geneticist must make sure that genetics never encroach upon human dignity."

**MULTIPLE BENEFITS**

The promise of biotechnologies for developing countries was underlined by M.G.K. Menon, former minister of state for science and technology of India and a member of the UNESCO International Bioethics Committee. "In the first stages, biotechnologies dealt with obtaining higher yields and disease-free conditions. Genetic engineering will be enormously valuable because genes which provide protection can be transferred across crops," he said, pointing to the need for increasing food production to face up to population growth of two million in the next 20 years. In the health field, biotechnologies can bring tremendous benefits through the early diagnosis of diseases and the development of vaccines. Menon viewed the area relating to biotechnologies and genetic engineering as "a model of regulated scientific and technological innovation embodying a new relationship between biomedical progress and the democratic public. Bioethics is really a new way of thinking about our future and our value systems."

**CHILLING PROSPECTS**

Taking the debate a step further, Jeremy Rifkin, president of the American Foundation on Economic Trends, argued that genes were the primary resource of the “biotech century”. "In the last 40 years, two emerging technologies had been operating on parallel tracks, computers and gene splicing. They are now fusing together, creating a powerful new marriage”. That genes are one of the hottest commodities can be gauged by the huge mergers and acquisitions taking place in the life sciences industry. Companies are selling off their chemical divisions to concentrate solely on the life sciences. “They have understood the passing of the petrochemical age and the dawn of the age of genetic commerce,” he affirmed, explaining that a handful of companies are scouting the planet for rare genes in nature. “The name of the game is patents. In the next seven to 10 years, we will have isolated virtually all 60,000 genes that make up the blueprint of the human race. Virtually every single one of those genes will be the intellectual property of life science companies. They will own the genetic blueprints of our species for 20 years at least.”

Despite the oft-mentioned benefits of biotechnologies in the fields of agriculture, medicine and energy resources, Rifkin argued that “the implications of this new science and its technological applications are chilling. We don’t know how gene spliced lab-conceived versions of plants will react in the environment. Insurance companies won’t touch this because there is no science upon which they can judge risk.”

He underlined that genetic engineering ushered in a radically different way of conceiving evolution. "Whereas in classical breeding we are constrained by biological boundaries, genetic engineering allow unrelated species to be crossed. It applies the engineering principles such as quality control, quantifiable standards of measurement, efficiency and utility to the blueprints of life. What will it mean to live in a world where babies are customized at conception and human beings are stereotyped and discriminated against on the basis of their genetic information? The most chilling prospect of all is letting the market place and consumer choice be the final arbiter of the future evolutionary direction of the human race."

**SPARKING DEBATE**

He advocated a “soft path” to the 21st century, governed by two basic rules: “do no harm, and choose the path that is the least likely to foreclose opportunities for those who are not yet here. ” Use genetic science to understand the relationship between plants and the environment in order to create a sophisticated organic based agriculture. In the medical field, develop preventive health by understanding the subtle relationship between genetic predispositions for disease and environmental triggers.

Finally, he called for “a robust public debate around the world, a more elaborate and sophisticated debate than we have had up to now so that this science is used to reconnect us, to integrate us back into our partnership with the rest of the biosphere that we live in.”

Cynthia Guttman
**WOMEN BEHIND THE HEADLINES**

**MEDIA** Journalists from Mediterranean countries share grievances and learn new skills, in the aim of breaking through to the top.

If more women had top jobs in the media, the male-oriented view of the world we too often get might change. So might the overly stereotyped view of women we tend to receive, be it through the print or audiovisual media. It was this belief that led to a joint Italian-UNESCO project to train women journalists in Mediterranean countries.

About 20 women trainee or professional journalists, all from Mediterranean countries, attended three seminars – in Cairo last December on management of small and medium-sized media outfits, in Jordan last March on desktop publishing, and in Morocco last April on women, media and good governance. The goal was to train women so as to give them a better chance at senior posts and thus have a decisive influence on their societies.

**INEQUALITIES**

The first thing to be looked at is why women have been and still are so ignored by the media in countries both north and south of the Mediterranean. The figures speak for themselves. Only 20.7% of journalists from Mediterranean countries are women, 22% in Belgium, 29% in France, 25% in Algeria, 28% in Egypt, 10% in Jordan, 15% in Morocco and 20.6% in Tunisia, the countries participating in the seminars. They are also less likely than men to be invited to take part in “serious” programmes. They are often “invisible” because they are simply seen as “wives and mothers.”

Women sometimes also face a cultural handicap which affects, or even restricts their training. “A man in an Arab country finds it easier than a woman, culturally, to become a journalist, to speak in public and to display curiosity,” says Sylvie Debras, a journalist who represented France and is writing a thesis on women and the media. “That sort of thing’s straightforward for men, but women have to work at this practical aspect early on in the training.”

Social and family pressure may also be a big block to women getting top jobs. In Egypt, says Gihan, editor of a feminist magazine, “to become a journalist is a challenge in itself because it’s a patriarchal society and women don’t belong in politics.” Gihan paid the price for insisting on a professional life when her husband broke up with her because he could not tolerate her independence. The same thing very often happens on the other side of the Mediterranean too.

Many women journalists say they are too often assigned to isolated editorial departments and rarely asked to cover political events. “First we have to fight the prejudices of our colleagues,” says Fatima, a Moroccan journalist. “Being ready for breaking news, doing a reporting job, going to late-night news conferences means you have to be available,” which is not the idea male journalists have of a woman. So as soon as a woman journalist has a baby, they give her a token job and assign her to the health, beauty or fashion departments.

“A news report is subject to two criteria,” says Debras. “That sort of thing’s straightforward for men, but women have to work at this practical aspect early on in the training.”

At the Cairo seminar, two participants present a project for a magazine dealing with women’s real preoccupations and their place in society.

**RESOLUTIONS**

The choice of the Mediterranean basin as focus of the seminars enabled women journalists to realize that despite some shared problems, the basic obstacles were not the same in the South as in the North. “Playing an active part and developing a critical spirit,” says Gihan, means overcoming discriminatory attitudes and the “dependent” status of women. “The surprising thing is that at first, many Arab women vigorously denied the problem. Only after a lot of discussion did they admit that men and women were not equally treated inside the media,” noted Debras.

At the end of the seminar, the journalists made a number of recommendations and decisions. They decided to set up a League of Arab Women Journalists to monitor the difficulties they shared. A newsletter is planned “by and for women journalists,” though its launch date and staff have not yet been decided on. A data bank on the situation of women is also foreseen. The women called for better elementary training more suited to their societies, equal pay, the chance to work in the same departments as men and equal chances generally. All of them demands expressing hope for far-reaching changes in the position of women in the media. Something which the press, that false mirror of a society, ought one day to reflect.

C. L., with Latifa Tayah
next month's issue:

UNESCO'S FIRST WORLD CULTURE REPORT
WOMEN AND SCIENCE

on UNESCO's calendar

from 18 to 25 July
AFRICAN COASTS
In Maputo, Mozambique, the first pan-African conference on Sustainable Integrated Coastal Management will gather African environment ministers and experts.

from 28 to 29 July
HERITAGE IN MALAYSIA
In Penang, Malaysia, a seminar will look into the possible nomination of seven cultural and natural sites in the country, which so far, has none on the World Heritage List.

from 4 to 7 August
WORLD HERITAGE
At Headquarters, the Conference of the International Association for Counselling will gather some 300 participants working in this field.

August 9
INTERNATIONAL DAY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

from 12 to 14 August
LIBRARIES AND THE NEW TECHNOLOGIES
In Noordwijk, the Netherlands, some thirty librarians and associated networks from around the world will discuss the role of public libraries as gateways to the information society.

August 23
MEMORY OF SLAVERY
International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition.

from 26 to 28 August
MANAGING WATER SCARCITY
In Hurghada, Egypt, the International Conference on Coping with Water Scarcity. On the agenda: hydraulic resources, desertification, water storage and recycling.