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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**34th Session of the General Conference
Ministerial Round Table
“Education and Economic Development”
Paris, France, 19-20 October 2007:**

Report

Report on the Ministerial Round Table on Education and Economic Development

Paris, France, 19-20 October 2007

Introduction

During recent decades, the global economy has become increasingly integrated. The shift towards globalization in economic development has highlighted the need to evaluate the vital role of education in this trend. It was in this context that the Ministerial Round Table on Education and Economic Development brought together 96 Ministers and a total of 250 senior decision-making officials from UNESCO Member States and representatives from United Nations agencies and the Organization for Economic Co-operation Development (OECD) to discuss the links between education and economic development, notably the relation to public policies for achieving pro-poor growth in relation to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

UNESCO Director-General's opening statement

Mr Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, opened the Round Table, welcoming Ministers and participants to Paris. He expressed his gratitude that Mr Angel Gurría, Secretary-General of the OECD, was present to deliver a keynote address, and underlined the ongoing cooperation that UNESCO and the OECD continue to enjoy, notably in the field of education.

The Director-General reflected on the outcomes of the previous two round tables that focused on quality of education (2003) and Education for All (EFA) (2005), which served to give fresh impetus to the promotion of education globally. He noted that the agendas of EFA and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are closely linked, stressing that they must be addressed together, and holistically, in order to ensure the full enjoyment of the right to education and the “achievement of full social and economic participation”.

Calling on participants to examine the dynamic interface between education and economic development, the Director-General recalled the pledge made by the international community to promote and support equitable economic development oriented towards the needs of the poor, the marginalized and the disadvantaged. He urged participants to give strong emphasis to the ethical dimension, especially as they envisioned criteria and strategies that shape policy choices and priorities in educational expenditure.

Mr Matsuura then turned his attention to the provision of education, which is largely predicated upon the availability of economic resources. He spoke about the virtuous circle of progress, noting that an increasing economic base and associated tax revenue enable governments to raise their investments in education, thus providing their citizens with a higher quality of education. He maintained that the concept of ‘sustainability’ provides a key framework for understanding the values of education; the term helps us to cultivate our capacities of critical understanding, careful analysis and respect for others.

Finally, Mr Matsuura noted that the Round Table illustrated that education and economic development are a global concern and can only be pursued as a collective global enterprise, with mutually supportive commitments and through effective collaboration among all stakeholders, notably inter-Ministerial cooperation.

OECD Secretary-General's keynote speech

Mr Angel Gurría, Secretary-General of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), began his keynote address by defining a highly competitive globalized economy as one in which “knowledge, skills and know-how are key factors for productivity, economic growth and better living conditions”. The international community must therefore focus on providing effective and innovative education policies, he said, thereby replacing weak education systems that result in declining standards, social exclusion and unemployment. Mr Gurría spoke about the benefits from education, concentrating on the sense of empowerment that education brings to individuals, allowing them to be fully active citizens, and fostering solidarity and understanding in an unequal and very complex world.

Maintaining that education is a more important driver of growth than business investment, population growth or even price stability, Mr Gurría stressed the importance of the virtuous circle of education, noting that ‘learning begets learning’. He then focused on quality of education, both from an individual perspective of choosing a school as well as for the economy as a whole, stating that ‘increasing just the quantity of education without regard to its quality may do little for economic development’.

Mr Gurría then addressed the notable progress that has been made to raise education levels in all countries, acknowledging UNESCO's efforts in this regard. He then emphasized the current competition for scarce public resources between education and other sectors, stating that the assurance of high quality standards of education remains one of the most challenging tasks for education ministers. Mr Gurría then explored the difficult choices policy-makers face when deciding which areas of education to invest in: primary or secondary schooling? Technical and engineering schools? Medical schools? He spoke about the ‘brain drain’, and cautioned against investing in higher education over investment in elementary and secondary schools, stating that ‘it may, on balance, be less expensive and more efficient to focus on this area, given the resources at hand.’ He concluded by reinforcing the notion that all people deserve the best education we can provide, and that we should all continue to be hungry for change and strive for excellence.

Organization of the Round Table and the Report

Chaired by Mr. Matsuura, the Round Table was a forum for UNESCO Member States to identify new ideas, evaluate existing practices and generate recommendations for future action in policy-making processes. There were nearly 350 participants, including Ministers and Vice-Ministers from 96 countries and representatives from the key multilateral agencies engaged in EFA. The Round Table held four main plenary sessions, each of which was opened by a series of lead comments and presentations, and was followed by an open debate. The plenary sessions focused on the following four themes:

- the right to education and the right to development
- the direct and indirect contributions of education to economic growth
- education and sustainable development

- partnerships for education and economic development

This report presents the proceedings in accordance with the order of the agenda, which is appended. The principal themes of each session and the key areas of debate are outlined. The addresses made by the Director-General of UNESCO and the Secretary-General of the OECD are included as appendices, as well as the background documents prepared for each session and a list of participants.

1. The right to education and the right to development – the normative foundations of education and economic participation, and their translation into policy and practice

Opening the first session of the Ministerial Round Table on education and economic development, the Chair, Mr Bertel Haarder, Minister of Education, Denmark, invited Ministers to reflect on the three dimensions of education: education for employment and growth, education for citizenship (including gender equality) and education for personal development (including knowledge of personal heritage). He emphasized the importance of examining real competences, and made reference to the main message that arose from the youth forum, about not simply confining education to a classroom setting. He asked the Round Table to focus its efforts on identifying effective strategies and methods through which UNESCO and the OECD can help ensure these rights to education and development in all countries.

India: Economic growth and human justice

Mr Arjun Singh, Minister of Human Resource Development, India, then took the floor, focusing on education as a fundamental right for all individuals, endorsed by international declarations and the Millennium Development Goals. Stating that economic growth can only be sustainable if accompanied by human justice, Mr Singh emphasized the need to restructure basic education systems to ensure their inclusiveness for all social groups alike, and mentioned that private sector education expansion must be reviewed to ensure that it is benefiting the education system as a whole. He also drew attention to India's expansion of secondary and tertiary education, and its focus on reducing discrimination and addressing its teacher shortage dilemma.

While stressing that the aim of education is to increase self-esteem, ethics, knowledge and skills, and that development is an integrated process where freedom and education take an equal role, Mr Singh spoke about the importance of establishing a framework for sustainable development that pervades all aspects of life, including education, notably in curriculum and teaching methods. He ended by urging Ministers to be conscious of the need to balance modernization with preserving cultural heritage as we develop educational platforms that shape and empower future generations.

Ecuador: Tackling debt

Mr Raúl Vallejo Corral, Minister of Education of Ecuador, asked participants to reflect on exactly what kind of development was being discussed. He spoke about an economic model of development that was imposed upon and prevalent in Latin America in the 1990s (referred to as the 'long neo-liberal night'), which involved servicing foreign debt and increased privatization, including in the education sector, and generally "put wolves in charge of sheep". He spoke at length about the destruction of state resources that occurred during that time in Ecuador, and that despite a revising of national education objectives in light of Dakar and the tremendous progress that has been achieved since 2000, many challenges remain, notably 12,000 teaching positions that are still vacant. He stressed the need to understand and go beyond the dichotomy whereby the state and the market compete, stating that an economic system that orients investment needs to be established, with a focus on quality education and human beings. Mr Corral urged Ministers to understand that the weight of foreign debt needs to be overcome in developing countries such as Ecuador before greater investment in public education can occur and before these countries can join the global market. He ended his

intervention with a quote by José Martí, a Cuban author, who said that “Let the world be grafted onto our republics, but we must be the trunk”.

Perspectives

Participants agreed on the importance of reminding ourselves that development issues are far more complex than we make them out to be, notably with respect to challenges faced by developing countries that impact upon the choices made and the ability to execute education programmes. One participant specifically noted that given resource constraints, many developing countries cannot guarantee certain ‘rights’ to their citizens, such as that of free education. The discussions during this session focused largely on issues of quality, inclusion, and training and incentives, with all participants reflecting the urgency of developing new and innovative strategies to provide equal opportunities for all learners so they may gain certain skills and competences and be active citizens. This was of specific importance to countries facing conditions of fragility. Other issues discussed included higher education and the ‘brain drain’, equitable development when faced with the unequal distribution of resources, the development of pro-poor policies, the re-direction of available resources, greater involvement of the private sector in education systems, and school feeding programmes.

Quality: A focus on improving the quality of the education system as a whole will lead to improving the quality of curricula and knowledge being passed down, further empowering generations and increasing the economic growth of countries. One important question was how countries facing fragile conditions, with infrastructure being repeatedly destroyed, can ensure access and improve quality.

Inclusion: Education has the potential to act as an equalizer, but only if that potential is unlocked through public policies that remove social, economic and cultural barriers facing marginalized groups (such as the disabled, the poor and those in rural areas), which many mechanisms have tried to accomplish and thus far failed.

Training and Incentives: There is a need for training and incentives for teachers and students (such as encouraging teachers to teach in rural areas and persuading students to stay in school), in order to best equip all citizens with the tools and skills to face the new world, including keeping up with technology, knowledge societies and the job market. This includes formal, non-formal and informal education, as well as ICTs.

Quotes:

Education pays off more than any other investment – Costa Rica

Without education, people are deprived of the tools to achieve their full potential as human beings – Portugal

Life-long learning is a major instrument for substantive impact on development on a global scale – Czech Republic

Our job is to turn the innate talent of our youth into productive input into society - Cambodia

2. The direct and indirect contributions of education to economic growth – learning, knowledge, skills and capacities in national development and the global economy

The purpose of this session was to explore how investment in various levels and types of education can best foster the foundational skills for economic development, and address demands such as employment trends and needs and the growth of different sectors of the economy. Mr Daniel Filmus, Minister of Education of Argentina, and moderator of the session, spoke about the positive impact on economic development that occurred in his country due to an increased percentage of funding devoted to technical and vocational training. He also mentioned a new working group that is being established, endorsed by the Director-General of UNESCO, to study new types of funding mechanisms, such as debt swaps for education , that will lead to improved sustainability of economic development over time.

USA: Qualified teachers and improving curricula

Mrs Margaret Spellings, Secretary of State of Education for the United States of America, focused on the achievements made through curricula emphasizing academic rigour and employing dedicated, qualified teachers. She emphasized that literacy is the foundation of all other learning, and leads to empowerment, such as in the ability to read a prescription and/or a voting ballot. Mrs Spellings referred to the increased role that the business community is playing in the USA's education programme, specifically in aligning curricula with the needs of the job market and facilitating a positive impact on worker productivity and, overall, raising the standard of living. She emphasized the need for transparency in all approaches, and urged governments to look into holding schools accountable for each and every child.

Kenya: Societal and personal benefits

Societal and personal benefits brought about through education were presented to participants by Mr George Saitoti, Minister of Education of Kenya. He mentioned studies that show a direct link between the average years of secondary schooling and the overall economic growth of a country, noting that education not only helps people become more productive, but also strengthens social cohesion, improves family planning, lowers infant mortality, prevents potential conflicts and increases the skill-level of the workforce. He stressed that populations being able to respond rapidly to change in societies is a guiding principle of human development, and one learned through increased exposure to education.

Mexico: Distribution of income and knowledge

Ms Josefina Vásquez Mota, Minister of Public Education of Mexico, addressed the lack of a globalization of knowledge, and spoke about the need to harmonize the distribution of skills imparted across the globe, in order to enable a better distribution of income and greater prosperity for all. She mentioned that the working world must open its doors to students, as well as vice versa, noting that we cannot speak of development without giving opportunity to our students to finish their studies, and provide them with options they can be enthusiastic about.

Ms Mota mentioned the challenge of migration faced by the Mexican school system, noting that a child in school is three times more protected than a child outside of the school system. She ended by urging participants to collectively and comprehensively examine education,

stating that it can - and should - lead to 'six bridges'; development, income distribution, quality, assessment, freedom/democracy and happiness.

Benin: Quality of human resources

Ms Christine Ouinsavi, Minister of Primary and Mass Education in Benin, emphasized the situation in developing countries, where the countries are potentially rich but populations are quite poor. She reminded participants of previous UN declarations showing that education is the basis of development, stating that although the 1980s and 1990s are commonly referred to as 'decades for development', very little development, in fact, took place during these years.

She stressed the importance of programmes that help transfer the learning of social skills alongside academic knowledge that, together, are aimed at shaping citizens. She mentioned that although the job market is not saturated in Benin, often graduates need to create businesses themselves in order to best use the knowledge and skills they have acquired. She acknowledged appreciation for those countries that have helped Benin's education system, through increased human resource training and expansion of technical and vocational schools, thereby pulling the country out of underdevelopment.

Perspectives

Many participants stressed the importance of principles such as moderation and adaptation, notably asserting the importance of taking advantage of available natural resources and being acutely aware of the relationship between a nation's demographics and its economy, and the impact this has on education. Decisions regarding short-term and long-term investment opportunities were acknowledged to be challenging for governments, as needs must be addressed as soon as possible but in a sustainable, balanced manner.

Integrated Policies – Policies addressing education should be developed after a thorough examination of how labour markets and social classes would be impacted. Otherwise, there is a risk that initiatives implemented will rest purely on academic or theoretical bases, and will not aid in fostering research and innovation, as well as economic development more generally.

Training – A strong emphasis on vocational training was made by the majority of participants, with several stating that their countries' education budget is prioritizing the provision of children with necessary skills to have an increased chance of being included in society. Similarly, 'business matching programs' that link education and the economy, and match up graduating students with jobs, were discussed. It was noted, however, that in the globalized world, it is increasingly important to not provide people with skills that are too specific to one industry, so as not to be employable in other sectors.

Quotes:

Those without literacy skills are cut off from opportunities – USA

We cannot predict tomorrow's pressing global challenges, but we can rest assured that education will supply our students with the skills they need to address the problem we encounter – USA

The world is waking up too late to the truth that development is nothing without education - Benin

3. Education and sustainable development – quality education at all levels and the challenge of sustainability

A youth representative (from Ecuador) opened this session by bringing forward the messages from the UNESCO General Conference Youth Forum, centred on the subject of change. She spoke about the voice of youth being focused on building equitable societies and being facilitators of leadership, aiming to demonstrate that education is not just a tool for sustainable development but an objective in and of itself, and “above all a human right”. She drew attention to the importance of promoting the exchange of ethical and cultural information as well as scientific and artistic projects. Finally, she recalled that societies that invest in their youth tend to be more economically prosperous, with populations less ridden with strife than those that do not support their youth. She thanked participants for their attention, reiterated the need to include younger generations in policies and ended with a quote by former Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa: “you can cut flowers but you cannot stop the spring”.

Subsequently, Ms Naledi Pandor, Minister of Education of South Africa and moderator of this session, spoke about the need to “ensure that the voice of the future is heard today and continues to be heard tomorrow”. She urged participants to think about our global consumption levels, which have reached levels never seen previously, and asked the following specific questions: How do we learn how to sustain our world in perpetuity? What do we do in pedagogy to ensure our generation does not destroy the world?

Costa Rica: Taking advantage of natural resources

Mr Leonardo Garnier-Rimolo, Minister of Education of Costa Rica, concentrated on the inefficient use of resources, notably in poorer countries, and the vicious cycle of further destruction that ensues. Noting the importance of achieving global environmental stability, Mr Garnier-Rimolo emphasized that education for sustainable development is of increasing importance for all countries. Development that is socially, politically and environmentally sustainable must be promoted, through social equity and democratic regimes. He urged governments to use natural resources to respect and conserve at the same time, stressing that such programmes should be addressed holistically, among various ministers within a government as well as between governments. He mentioned the need to invest in those products that respect a country’s specific resources, and that this is an education that must be instilled in a country’s curriculum, either formally or informally. He concluded by stressing the importance of an education that teaches sustainable development alongside economic processes that make the most use of natural resources in individual countries.

Sweden: Addressing environmental issues

Reminding those present of the first two UN conferences focused on the environment, held in Stockholm and Rio de Janeiro, Sweden’s Minister of Higher Education and Research, Mr Lars Leijonborg, articulated the growing popular awareness of the negative affects of humans on nature since those conferences. Scientific breakthroughs and political commitments have allowed for greater emphasis on sustainable development processes and the expanding role of education in these processes. He spoke about the necessity to inspire young people to study science and technology, and to impart sustainable development values to them. Creativity and entrepreneurship need to be promoted, including the responsibility of addressing environmental problems. He stressed that environmental degradation will hit the poorest populations the hardest, and reiterated his firm belief that an education that includes a link between the environment, democracy and human rights, with a focus on preparing students

for changes in the economy and social values, is the most comprehensive education we can provide for our youth.

Viet Nam: Curriculum changes

Mr M. Nguyen Thien Nhan, Minister of Education and Training and Deputy Prime Minister of Viet Nam, addressed the link between education and sustainable development, noting that the quality of the education process is the key input for social and economic development, which is itself the foundation for education, whether sustainable or not. He stressed the need for changes to the curriculum that encourage further community involvement and that enable students and graduates to be more in touch with their surrounding environments. Mr Nhan also highlighted the need to improve the quality of teachers in general – but especially with regards to teaching sustainable development – and mentioned that teaching could be improved through better motivation of faculty and staff, student assessments and increased salaries, among other ideas. He stressed the important role that guidance and support by communities and governments play in improving the quality of teaching. He ended by mentioning several programmes put into place by the government of Viet Nam to encourage all children to continue to go to school, including those from poorer families. Only by ensuring that all children attend school will the achievement of sustainable development be attained.

Perspectives:

This session on education and sustainable development was one which saw the most interventions by Ministers, many reiterating the youth representative's notion that promoting education for sustainable development for younger generations is a key part of securing environmentally-sound development programmes. Many participants argued for the development of guidelines to preserve environmental values, stressing the importance of a balanced approach incorporating environmental, economic, social and human dimensions. An emphasis on more scientific exploration was heard, notably with respect to addressing climate change (reducing pollution, exploring alternative and clean energies, planting trees) and the preservation of water resources, especially from countries dependent on farm production. Building synergies among UN agencies to provide support to countries in dealing with these issues was also mentioned.

Holistic education programmes: Citizens should be aware of the impact of humans on development, be it ecologically or economically. Beyond teaching about environmental awareness, education for sustainable development should encompass all aspects that would lead to thriving economies, including addressing literacy, HIV and AIDS, child labour and cultural diversity. A few mentioned the need for a 'new' model of economic development, one that integrates research to a greater extent, and allows for more community involvement at the local level, notably incorporating both global and local traditions.

Responsibility: The idea of education as a way to impart to and teach learners the notion of responsibility (for a community as well as the global environment) was discussed. This includes teaching moderate consumption, sustainability, respect, humility and cultural understanding.

Quotes:

The culture of evolution needs to be spread out in the education system like a spoonful of butter spread out over a full slice of bread. – Ecuador

We need to harmonize our environments – Uganda

We need to teach environmental education while improving living conditions without destroying world resources – Russian Federation

4. Partnerships for education and economic development – international cooperation in education in favour of poverty reduction and economic growth.

Mr Bambang Sudibyo, Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia, opened the session by asking participants to reflect on the following four issues: support needed to create and enhance economic development; support for developing frameworks of national plans (i.e. Education for All, Fast Track Initiative, Poverty Reduction Strategies and Millennium Development Goals); best practices in education and economic development to allow for maximum synergy among stakeholders; and international partnerships to further link education with economic development.

Egypt: Education as means to greater societal production

Enabling access to education is one of the most importance issues for developing countries, according to Mr Yousri El-Gamal, Minister of Education of Egypt. Providing access is the first step to enabling students to become aware of economic opportunities available to them, thus allowing for a tailoring of education to the labour market skills necessary to enhance a country's economic production. He stressed that such skills can be taught either through formal school systems or informal community/home environments, via partnerships between governments, school management systems, civil society and international organizations.

He spoke about the 2006 organization created in Egypt to accredit the quality of education, established with critical involvement from civil society and local communities. Distribution of learning tools, notably computers, and the increased role of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in providing quality education were stressed in Mr El-Gamal's speech, notably the teacher training that must accompany these tools. In looking towards the future, he spoke about further exploration of linkages with the private sector, as well as a push for more cooperation (financial support as well as knowledge-sharing) between developed and developing countries.

Afghanistan: Role of partnerships in post-conflict countries

As the Minister of Education of a post-conflict country, Mr Mohammad Hanif Atmar reminded participants that more than 75 percent of resources invested in Afghanistan's education sector come from donor financing. Thus, there is reduced flexibility in making changes to the curriculum to allow for greater emphasis on education for sustainable development. Mr Atmar underlined the positive trends in economic growth that have arisen in Afghanistan from the "new modality of partnerships" focusing on improving the quality of education and reducing poverty, including more than four times as many schools built and a tremendous increase in the percentage of national budget devoted to education, as compared to six years ago.

Mr Atmar described the specific challenges associated with calling for a strategic review of international frameworks and a new paradigm and modality of partnerships, especially in countries in situations similar to that of Afghanistan, where supply side constraints such as a shortage of teachers, lack of school facilities, low quality education and irrelevant curriculum

are abundant. Moreover, the impact of terrorism on education, with teachers and students killed and the indoctrination of youth in secondary schools, remains high. He stressed the need to rely on the Paris Declaration of Aid Effectiveness while cautioning that, although tremendously important, international mechanisms should not be substitutes for national plans. Mr Atmar concluded by saying that Afghanistan welcomes cooperation and support from others as they develop nationally owned strategies for education based on their national framework.

Belgium: Partnership with the private sector

Ms Marie Arena, Minister President of the French Community of Belgium, addressed the growing role of the private sector in education, noting that Chancellors and other political figures are more and more obliged to be more aggressive and CEO-like in their search for external funding. She focused on education as a means to transform the private sector and society, and become a source of technical progress and growth.

Ms Arena highlighted what she perceives as a current lack of focus on basic and human sciences, in exchange for a push for purely economic growth. Calling for renewed attention to citizenship-building and cultural development, she underlined that one of the purposes of education is to develop a sense of belonging and to build national identity. She concluded by stressing that all educational systems must oppose homogenization inflicted by international organizations if national culture and identity are to remain.

Brazil:

In the context of partnerships, Mr Fernando Haddad, Minister of Education of Brazil, reminded participants that the eighth Millennium Development Goal (develop a global partnership for development) remains the most neglected of the MDGs. He urged developing countries to be more accountable in developing their own economic plans rather than relying too heavily on the support and advice from developed countries' aid agencies. He proposed the following three pillars as the basis for the development of national economic plans: systematic/holistic vision of the education system, from primary to tertiary levels; collaboration to reinforce national capabilities and adapt to good practices; establishing positive links between education and development. He concluded by suggesting alternative methods of addressing the financing burden, such as debt swaps for education, and urged UNESCO to take leadership in the interagency partnership for and development of North-South-South cooperation.

Perspectives:

Unemployment of youth was cited as a major problem in many countries. Vocational training at the secondary level is one way of addressing this, but further international collaboration on how to tackle this issue is needed. The importance of clearly delineated priorities was underlined during this discussion, as well as a push for greater inter-regional cooperation and private sector interventions.

Reciprocal assistance: A few developing countries spoke about the conditions set on their governments when donor assistance is given, urging partner countries to respect a developing country's goals and targets, notably by ensuring greater synchronization with efforts by communities, civil society and established businesses.

Quotes:

Education enables everybody to be fulfilled – Egypt

Let all those who believe in the well-being of their village, nation or world come together to ignite the fire of knowledge driven by universal values that generate wealth for all – Global Campaign for Education (Indian Mantra)

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