



The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development

THE WORLD DECLARATION ON EDUCATION FOR ALL: MEETING BASIC LEARNING NEEDS

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The Consultative Group Secretariat

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In 1990 an important conference, titled the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA), was convened in Jomtien, Thailand by the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF and UNDP. The conference brought together some 1500 people representing 155 governments, 33 intergovernmental bodies, and 125 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), institutes, and foundations. Organized in response to the widespread concern over the deterioration of education systems during the 1980s, the Conference concluded with the unanimous adoption of the "World Declaration on Education for All" and endorsed a "Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs."¹ Through these two texts, the world community renewed its commitment to ensuring the rights of all people to education and knowledge.

Two things were unique about this initiative:

1. *The breadth of its definitions of what is needed to make education available to all.* In addition to calling for universal access to schooling for all children, the declaration reaffirms that "every person—child, youth and adult—[should] be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs." These include "both essential learning tools, such as

literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving, and the basic learning content (knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning."

The declaration reflects its grounding in the realities of people's diverse needs by affirming that: "the scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and cultures, and inevitably changes with the passage of time."

The Declaration affirms the importance of early learning, by stating that "learning begins at birth. This calls for early childhood care and initial education. These can be provided through arrangements involving families, communities, or institutional programs, as appropriate."

2. Its focus on action. Countries were encouraged to formulate specific plans and policies based on the Framework for Action. To maintain the momentum generated at the WCEFA, an International Consultative Forum on EFA was established to promote and monitor the EFA goals and to facilitate information-sharing among countries, agencies and NGOs. The Forum Secretariat, based at UNESCO headquarters, is charged with global monitoring and promotion activities, and with organizing further meetings, publishing a bulletin, and maintaining a database on EFA indicators and activities. (See Related Resources for information on these).

As part of the action initiative, the Consultative Group Secretariat and most of the CG sponsoring members have played an active role in promoting EFA-inspired policies and projects supporting young children, and their families and communities.

The document excerpted below was adopted by the World Conference on Education for All, March 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand.

Meeting Basic Learning Needs: Preamble

More than 40 years ago, the nations of the world, speaking through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, asserted that "everyone has a right to education". Despite notable efforts by countries around the globe to ensure the right to education for all, the following realities persist:

- More than 100 million children, including at least 60 million girls, have no access to primary schooling;
- More than 960 million adults, two-thirds of whom are women, are illiterate, and functional illiteracy is a significant problem in all countries, industrialized and developing;
- More than one-third of the world's adults have no access to the printed knowledge, new skills and technologies that could improve the quality of their lives and help them shape, and adapt to, social and cultural change; and

- More than 100 million children and countless adults fail to complete basic education programmes; millions more satisfy the attendance requirements but do not acquire essential knowledge and skills.

At the same time, the world faces daunting problems, notably: mounting debt burdens, the threat of economic stagnation and decline, rapid population growth, widening economic disparities among and within nations, war, occupation, civil strife, violent crime, the preventable deaths of millions of children and widespread environmental degradation. These problems constrain efforts to meet basic learning needs, while the lack of basic education among a significant proportion of the population prevents societies from addressing such problems with strength and purpose.

These problems have led to major setbacks in basic education in the 1980s in many of the least developed countries. In some other countries, economic growth has been available to finance education expansion, but even so, many millions remain in poverty and unschooled or illiterate. In certain industrialized countries, too, cutbacks in government expenditure over the 1980s have led to the deterioration of education.

Yet the world is also at the threshold of a new century, with all its promise and possibilities. Today, there is genuine progress toward peaceful detente and greater cooperation among nations. Today, the essential rights and capacities of women are being realized. Today, there are many useful scientific and cultural developments. Today, the sheer quantity of information available in the world—much of it relevant to survival and basic well-being—is exponentially greater than that available only a few years ago, and the rate of its growth is accelerating. This includes information about obtaining more life-enhancing knowledge—or learning how to learn. A synergistic effect occurs when important information is coupled with another modern advance—our new capacity to communicate.

These new forces, when combined with the cumulative experience of reform, innovation, research and the remarkable educational progress of many countries, make the goal of basic education for all—for the first time in history—an attainable goal.

Therefore, we participants in the World Conference on Education for All, assembled in Jomtien, Thailand, from 5 to 9 March, 1990:

Recalling that education is a fundamental right for all people, women and men, of all ages, throughout the world;

Understanding that education can help ensure a safer, healthier, more prosperous and environmentally sound world, while simultaneously contributing to social, economic, and cultural progress, tolerance, and international cooperation;

Knowing that education is an indispensable key to, though not a sufficient condition for, personal and social improvement;

Recognizing that traditional knowledge and indigenous cultural heritage have value and validity in their own right and a capacity to both define and promote development;

Acknowledging that, overall, the current provision of education is seriously deficient and that it must be made more relevant and qualitatively improved, and made universally available;

Recognizing that sound basic education is fundamental to the strengthening of higher levels of education and of scientific and technological literacy and capacity and thus to self-reliant development; and

Recognizing the necessity to give to present and coming generations an expanded vision of, and a renewed commitment to, basic education to address the scale and complexity of the challenge;

proclaim the following

**World Declaration on Education for All:
Meeting Basic Learning Needs**

Education for All: The Purpose

■ ARTICLE 1: MEETING BASIC LEARNING NEEDS

1. Every person—child, youth, and adult—shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning. The scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and cultures, and inevitably, changes with the passage of time.

2. The satisfaction of these needs empowers individuals in any society and confers upon them a responsibility to respect and build upon their collective cultural, linguistic, and spiritual heritage, to promote the education of others, to further the cause of social justice, to achieve environmental protection, to be tolerant towards social, political and religious systems which differ from their own, ensuring that commonly accepted humanistic values and human rights are upheld, and to work for international peace and solidarity in an interdependent world.

3. Another and no less fundamental aim of educational development is the transmission and enrichment of common cultural and moral values. It is in these values that the individual and society find their identity and worth.

4. Basic education is more than an end in itself. It is the foundation for lifelong learning and human development on which countries may build, systematically, further levels and types of education and training.

Education for All: An Expanded Vision and a Renewed Commitment

■ ARTICLE 2: SHAPING THE VISION

1. To serve the basic learning needs of all requires more than a recommitment to basic education as it now exists. What is needed is an "expanded vision" that surpasses present resource levels, institutional structures, curricula, and conventional delivery systems while building on the best in current practices. New possibilities exist today, which result from the convergence of the increase in information and the unprecedented capacity to communicate. We must seize them with creativity and a determination for increased effectiveness.

2. As elaborated in Articles 3-7, the expanded vision encompasses:

- Universalizing access and promoting equity;
- Focussing on learning;
- Broadening the means and scope of basic education;
- Enhancing the environment for learning;
- Strengthening partnerships.

3. The realization of an enormous potential for human progress and empowerment is contingent upon whether people can be enabled to acquire the education and the start needed to tap into the ever-expanding pool of relevant knowledge and the new means for sharing this knowledge.

■ ARTICLE 3: UNIVERSALIZING ACCESS AND PROMOTING EQUITY

1. Basic education should be provided to all children, youth and adults. To this end, basic education services of quality should be expanded, and consistent measures must be taken to reduce disparities.

2. For basic education to be equitable, all children, youth and adults must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning.

3. The most urgent priority is to ensure access to, and improve the quality of, education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation. All gender stereotyping in education should be eliminated.

4. An active commitment must be made to removing educational disparities. Underserved groups—the poor; street and working children; rural and remote populations; nomads and migrant workers; indigenous people; ethnic, racial, and linguistic minorities; refugees; those displaced by war; and people under occupation—should not suffer any discrimination in access to learning opportunities.

5. The learning needs of the disabled demand special attention. Steps need to be taken to provide equal access to education to every category of disabled persons as an integral part of the education system.

■ ARTICLE 4: FOCUSING ON LEARNING ACQUISITION

Whether or not expanded educational opportunities will translate into meaningful development—for an individual or for society—depends ultimately on whether people actually learn as a result of those opportunities, i.e., whether they incorporate useful knowledge, reasoning ability, skills, and values. The focus of basic education must, therefore, be on actual learning acquisition and outcome, rather than exclusively upon enrolment, continued participation in organized programmes and completion of certification requirements. Active and participatory approaches are particularly valuable in assuring learning acquisition and allowing learners to reach their fullest potential. It is, therefore, necessary to define acceptable levels of learning acquisition for educational programmes and to improve and apply systems of assessing learning achievement.

■ ARTICLE 5: BROADENING THE MEANS AND SCOPE OF BASIC EDUCATION

The diversity, complexity, and changing nature of basic learning needs of children, youth and adults necessitates broadening and constantly redefining the scope of basic education to include the following components:

- *Learning begins at birth.* This calls for early childhood care and initial education. These can be provided through arrangements involving families, communities, or institutional programmes, as appropriate.

- *The main delivery system for the basic education of children outside the family is primary schooling.* Primary education must be universal, ensure that the basic learning needs of all children are satisfied, and take into account the culture, needs and opportunities of the community. Supplementary alternative programmes can help meet the basic learning needs of children with limited or no access to formal schooling, provided that they share the same standard of learning applied to schools, and are adequately supported.

- *The basic learning needs of youth and adults are diverse and should be met through a variety of delivery systems.* Literacy programmes are indispensable because literacy is a necessary skill in itself and the foundation of other life skills. Literacy in the mother-tongue strengthens cultural identity and heritage. Other needs can be served by: skills training, apprenticeships, and formal and non-formal education programmes in health, nutrition, population, agricultural techniques, the environment, science, technology, family life, including fertility awareness, and other societal issues.

- All available instruments and channels of information, communications and social action could be used to help convey essential knowledge and inform and educate people on social issues. In addition to the traditional means, libraries, television, radio and other media can be mobilized to realize their potential towards meeting basic education needs of all.

These components should constitute an integrated system—complementary, mutually reinforcing, and of comparable standards, and they should contribute to creating and developing possibilities for lifelong learning.

■ ARTICLE 6: ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING

Learning does not take place in isolation. Societies, therefore, must ensure that all learners receive the nutrition, health care, and general physical and emotional support they need in order to participate actively in and benefit from their education. Knowledge and skills that will enhance the learning environment of children should be integrated into community learning programmes for adults. The education of children and their parents or other caretakers is mutually supportive and this interaction should be used to create, for all, a learning environment of vibrancy and warmth.

■ ARTICLE 7: STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS

National, regional, and local educational authorities have a unique obligation to provide basic education for all, but they cannot be expected to supply every human, financial or organizational requirement for this task. New and revitalized partnerships at all levels will be necessary: partnerships among all sub-sectors and forms of education, recognizing the special role of teachers and that of administrators and other educational personnel; partnerships between education and other government departments, including planning, finance, labour, communications, and other social sectors; partnerships between government and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, local communities, religious groups, and families. The recognition of the vital role of both families and teachers is particularly important. In this context, the terms and conditions of service of teachers and their status, which constitute a determining factor in the implementation of education for all, must be urgently improved in all countries in line with the joint ILO/UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers (1966). Genuine partnerships contribute to the planning, implementing, managing and evaluating of basic education programmes. When we speak of "an expanded vision and a renewed commitment," partnerships are at the heart of it.

Education for All: the Requirements

■ ARTICLE 8: DEVELOPING A SUPPORTING POLICY CONTEXT

1. Supportive policies in the social, cultural, and economic sectors are required in order to realize the full provision and utilization of basic education for individual and societal improvement. The provision of basic education for all depends on political commitment and political will backed by appropriate fiscal measures and reinforced by educational policy reforms and institutional strengthening. Suitable economic, trade, labour, employment and health policies will enhance learners' incentives and contributions to societal development.

2. Societies should also insure a strong intellectual and scientific environment for basic education. This implies improving higher education and developing scientific research. Close contact with contemporary technological and scientific knowledge should be possible at every level of education.

■ ARTICLE 9: MOBILIZING RESOURCES

1. If the basic learning needs of all are to be met through a much broader scope of action than in the past, it will be essential to mobilize existing and new financial and human resources, public, private and voluntary. All of society has a contribution to make, recognizing 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.

2. Enlarged public-sector support means drawing on the resources of all the government agencies responsible for human development, through increased absolute and proportional allocations to basic education services with the clear recognition of competing claims on national resources of which education is an important one, but not the only one. Serious attention to improving the efficiency of existing educational resources and programmes will not only produce more, it can also be expected to attract new resources. The urgent task of meeting basic learning needs may require a reallocation between sectors, as, for example, a transfer from military to educational expenditure. Above all, special protection for basic education will be required in countries undergoing structural adjustment and facing severe external debt burdens. Today, more than ever, education must be seen as a fundamental dimension of any social, cultural, and economic design.

■ ARTICLE 10: STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

1. Meeting basic learning needs constitutes a common and universal human responsibility. It requires international solidarity and equitable and fair economic relations in order to redress existing economic disparities. All nations have valuable knowledge and experiences to share for designing effective educational policies and programmes.

2. Substantial and long-term increases in resources for basic education will be needed. The world community, including intergovernmental agencies and institutions, has an urgent responsibility to alleviate the constraints that prevent some countries from achieving the goal of education for all. It will mean the adoption of measures that augment the national budgets of the poorest countries or serve to relieve heavy debt burdens. Creditors and debtors must seek innovative and equitable formulae to resolve these burdens, since the capacity of many developing countries to respond effectively to education and other basic needs will be greatly helped by finding solutions to the debt problem.

3. Basic learning needs of adults and children must be addressed wherever they exist. Least developed and low-income countries have special needs which require priority in international support for basic education in the 1990s.

4. All nations must also work together to resolve conflicts and strife, to end military occupations, and to settle displaced populations, or to facilitate their return to their countries of origin, and ensure that their basic learning needs are met. Only a stable and peaceful environment can create the conditions in which every human being, child and adult alike, may benefit from the goals of this Declaration.

We, the participants in the World Conference on Education for All, reaffirm the right of all people to education. This is the foundation of our determination, singly and together, to ensure education for all.

We commit ourselves to act cooperatively through our own spheres of responsibility, taking all necessary steps to achieve the goals of education for all. Together we call on governments, concerned organizations and individuals to join in this urgent undertaking.

The basic learning needs of all can and must be met. There can be no more meaningful way to begin the International Literacy Year, to move forward the goals of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-92) the World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-97), the Fourth United Nations Development Decade (1991-2000), of the convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, and of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. There has never been a more propitious time to commit ourselves to providing basic learning opportunities for all the people of the world.

We adopt, therefore, this *World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs* and agree on the *Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs*, to achieve the goals set forth in this *Declaration*.

Related Resources

Secretariat for the EFA Forum

Housed at UNESCO, the EFA Forum Secretariat is charged with global monitoring and promotion of EFA activities. They organize regional and topical meetings, publish a quarterly bulletin titled *EFA 2000* (which includes the calendar of meetings), as well as periodic reports on various aspects of the EFA efforts. They maintain a database on EFA indicators and activities.

To order *EFA 2000* (in Arabic, English, French or Spanish), please address correspondence to: EFA 2000 Bulletin/ EFA Forum Secretariat/ UNESCO, 7 Place de Fontenoy/ 75352 Paris 07 SP, FRANCE. Fax (33-1) 40 65 94 06.

Other titles available from the EFA Forum Secretariat:

"Status and Trends" - a report published in 1993 which attempts to give a global overview, through the graphic presentation of data, of the current situation of basic education and the significant trends affecting it. Early childhood information is sparse in this document, but there are some data on education of women.

"World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs." This booklet offers the full text of the Jomtien Declaration and Action Framework.

"Final Report: World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs." Report on the Jomtien Conference, 5-9 March 1990.

"Final Report: International Consultative Forum on Education for All." Report on the Paris conference, 4-6 December, 1991

Forthcoming in 1994: the final report on the International Consultative Forum on Education for All meeting in New Delhi, India, September 8-10, 1993.

"Meeting Basic Learning Needs: a Vision for the 1990s" A background document for the World Conference on EFA, 5 - 9 March, 1990, Jomtien, Thailand. (Not to be confused with the similarly titled booklet, mentioned below, produced by the Consultative Group on ECCD).

1991 International Directory of Young Child and Family Institutions/ Repertoire internationale sur le jeune enfant et le milieu familial. A directory of groups and foundations involved in ECCD efforts internationally. Available from the Education Documentation Centre, 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75700 Paris, France.

UNICEF activities in response to the Jomtien Challenge

"UNICEF's response to the Jomtien Challenge," is a report issued in May 1992 by the Education Section, Programme Division, outlining UNICEF's activities and strategies relating to the Education for All initiative. Available from UNICEF, Education Section, Programme Division, Three United Nations Plaza, New York, New York 10017.

As a follow-up to the EFA challenge, UNICEF has also produced several summary reports, titled "Toward Education For All" detailing UNICEF's actions and progress toward achieving the EFA goals.

Two recent UNICEF publications which address the education of girls and women are: "Strategies to Promote Girls' Education: Policies and Programmes that Work" (June 1992, Education Section) and "Educating Girls and Women: A Moral Imperative." (January 1992, Education Section)

First Steps Video

Produced by the Aga Khan Foundation, in coordination with the CG Secretariat, this video was prepared for the EFA forum second meeting, held in New Delhi, Sept. 1993. It illustrates that learning begins at birth and that the first formative years of life are crucial in the development of an individual's ability to learn throughout life. Available for cost plus mailing charges from: Aga Khan Foundation/ PO box 6179/ 1211 Geneva, 6/ Switzerland.

The Consultative Group on ECCD

"Meeting Basic Learning Needs through Programmes of Early Childhood Care and Development" is a booklet prepared originally by the Consultative Group on ECCD as a handout for the New Delhi Forum on EFA. Now it has been reprinted as a primer on ECCD strategies. It is available from the CG Secretariat upon request. The Consultative Group/ 6 The Lope/Haydenville, MA 01039/ USA. Fax (413) 268-7279.

Endnotes

¹ UNESCO, 1990, see Related Resources.

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Early Childhood Counts: Programming Resources for Early Childhood Care and Development.
CD-ROM. The Consultative Group on ECCD. Washington D.C. : World Bank, 1999.