

Strengthening the Contribution of Higher Education and NGOs in Education for All (EFA)

**Organized by the Working Group on Education for All of the NGO-UNESCO Liaison
Committee**

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International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) -UNESCO**

Participants

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the field of EFA, universities dealing in the domain of education, and representatives from international organizations linked to EFA.

Aim of the Workshop

Since the Education for All (EFA) World Forum in Senegal in 2000, a succession of international, regional and local meetings have all examined the six goals of the EFA movement and issues dealing with access, quality, efficiency and equity of educational systems. The reports produced have stressed the gap between the identified goals and the achieved results, most highly noted in the least developed countries.

At the international and national level and in the field, it is now recognized that the contribution of NGOs and universities (employing the word in a large sense to include all higher education institutions) in this domain is essential as the target deadline approaches.

Reflection is needed in order to reverse the current trend and to permit access for all to education as soon as possible.

Taking on this perspective, the Working Group, in tandem with its ongoing activities and in follow-up to its workshop on NGOs and Education for All, held on June 17th, 2003 at UNESCO, intends to work closer with the higher education community in order to highlight examples of their contribution and to suggest means by which to reinforce their activities.

Role of Higher Education

To date, higher education has been rarely consulted and remains under engaged in EFA, yet universities play many key roles.

- One of the strategic factors for improving the output of educational systems is the quality of teachers. Often it is universities who train the teachers.
- If the teacher-student rapport is at the heart of successful learning, this success cannot be attained without knowledge of the pupils' characteristics (social-economic, cultural, psychological, etc.). Again, it is often the universities who are responsible for collecting this knowledge, and consequently, for examining this core issue to ensure the relevancy of education.
- The educational process cannot exist without pedagogical resources: study programmes, textbooks, and instructional materials adapted for the different age groups found within the educational system. Here again, the tasks of conceptualisation, elaboration, usage, evaluation, review often fall to the universities;
- Education occurs at various times and places. Who do we rely on the most to determine the infrastructure and equipment to respond to the needs of different learning populations? Yet again, it's the universities.
- Today education demands the knowledge, usage, and training of the new information and communication technology (ICT). Who can evaluate its relevancy and cost-efficiency in order to create tools of genuine worth and not only trendy gadgets? Who can design and develop – or, at least, assist in doing so – software appropriately adapted for different types of students and learning? Who can train teachers to use them? There again, universities.
- Taking into consideration the pace, intensity and scope of economic, social, cultural and political changes and their impact on educational systems, who can ensure or contribute to the tracking of the effects of these changes on educational systems vis-à-vis the needs of a society they should be serving? Again, the universities.
- The educational system is part of a social system. It alone cannot resolve society's problems, let alone its own problems or difficulties. All too often it is the universities who have the responsibility for analyzing the problems facing society, and equally affecting the educational system, and for suggesting practical means to deal with them.

Cooperation between Universities and NGOs

Achieving the EFA goals within the framework of the United Nations Millennium Development Objectives (MDGs) requires a concerted effort and synergy amongst all societal players, from the individual to the institutional standpoint. Universities do have a major role to play, cooperating closely with public institutions and civil society.

Many examples of cooperation exist, yet they are often rarely or poorly known. These need to be identified and promoted to increase their chances of success, as well as, to draw lessons from encountered difficulties and failures.

How can projects and institutional guidelines be appropriately adapted to best ensure the convergence and synergy between universities and NGOs and as well as to encourage the achievement of EFA goals? How can they be financed?

Too often, universities appear as dominating institutions, unable to recognize the need for working closely with NGOs. NGOs use urgent interventions, while universities favour longer term projects. NGOs work closely with local institutions, whereas universities

privilege larger audiences. We have to build networks in the framework of each country in order to develop useful and sustainable cooperation between the two.

The workshop presented examples of successful partnerships between universities and NGOs in Latin America and Africa.

- Research-action exchanges whereby researchers and practitioners learnt from one another and exchanged their respective working methods.
- Training agreements between NGOs and universities whereby NGOs participate in the training process;
- On-campus NGO initiatives and the recruitment of students in fieldwork activities;
- University validation of professional skills within NGOs.

Participants bore witness to concrete examples of cooperation:

- Experiences of research-action whereby researchers and practitioners learnt from one another and changed their respective working methods;
- Training agreements between NGOs and universities whereby NGOs participate in the training process;
- On-campus NGO initiatives and the recruitment of students in fieldwork activities;
- University validation of professional skills within NGOs.

Strategies for building stronger partnerships

From the point of view of higher education institutions, NGOs are expected to:

- Have a monitoring role and bring forward local needs to universities;
- Not to limit the role of universities to teacher training and research in educational sciences;
- Participate in student training by bringing their expertise.

From the point of view of NGOs, universities are expected to:

- Support project conceptualization;
- Provide support in programme evaluation;
- Provide a forum for debate and initiatives;
- Strengthen their involvement in EFA through research, publications, colloquiums, and North-South and South-South partnerships.

Discussions highlighted the existing differences between ONG and higher education in relation to their history, vision, and operating methods. In order to develop partnerships and facilitate synergy building, both sides need to seek out:

- Common interests;
- Communication methods encouraging understanding;
- Mutual recognition.

The final report, in French, includes presentations made, reports, and examples submitted to the Secretary of the EFA Group by participants. It is available online on the UNESCO-NGO Liaison Committee website (<http://ong-comite-liaison.unesco.org>)