

Quality Education Discussion

Individual members and/or members from the following countries participated in the discussion - Britain, Cameroon, Canada, El Salvador, France, Kenya, Malawi, New Zealand, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, The Netherlands, Uganda and the USA,

The discussion was spread over a period of four weeks guided by a series of questions. While some questions generated a lot of responses, others were responded to by just a handful of contributors. We would like to thank those who participated in the discussion. It was a learning experience for all of us and we appreciated those of you who were prepared to share your ideas and hope that we might further explore the subject of Quality Education more fully in the 2010 Conference programme.

The objective of the Discussion was to identify:

1. Definitions of quality education
2. The range of indicators for quality education
3. The policies that ensure quality education
4. The barriers to achieving quality education and how they might be overcome
5. How quality education could be promoted and
6. The state obligations for the provision of quality education.

Defining and identifying indicators for Quality Education

What was apparent in the responses was that whether the respondent was from a developing country, a developed country or a war or famine ravaged country in Africa they all aspired to see an education system in place that gave each child

- A better quality of life,
- Access to opportunities leading to a productive life
- The potential to find answers to problems
- Education that contributed to peace
- The knowledge of and respect for history, culture, music and the environment in which it lives
- A healthy lifestyle, quality in relationships, family and community life, and a knowledge of financial management for life after school.

Against these ideals was the identification of the realities for education, and the barriers to the provision of quality education, especially in many of the developing countries – issues such as the lack of

- Enrolment in tertiary education
- Opportunities for employment and promotion for educators
- Opportunities for adult education
- A realistic teacher:student ratio
- Adequate qualifications for teachers, salaries and conditions of service
- Infrastructure that meets the needs of students and staff
- Resources for students to acquire numeracy and literacy skills

- Employment opportunities for school leavers and those with post-secondary education
- Competition for University graduates to access postgraduate places or academic appointments in overseas Universities
- Research productivity of academic staff in Universities
- Linking number of persons with HIV/AIDS at different levels as a partial assessment of empowerment and decision making skills
- Levels of patronage of arts and cultural exhibitions and access to these
- Levels of participation in political debates and lifestyle choices against sustainable development indicators
- Facilities that recognized the needs of disabled persons
- Cognitive tests, enrolment by level, investment in education by public, recognizing that education has a social role to play in personal life, reducing the illiteracy rate, and decreasing the crime rate
- Vision combined with knowledge

Overall contributors summed up these concerns as the result of a lack of political will and recognition of the critical role of education in the national development of a country. Poverty and exponential population increases were also seen as barriers to achieving positive education outcomes in a country.

Reasons for a Decline in Quality Education

Evidence of a decline in quality education from the perspective of the respondents can be summed up as:

- Curriculum which is inadequate for a globalized world
- Costs of education via the provision of buildings and facilities, teaching and learning resources and school uniforms
- Provision of suitable learning environments
- Inadequately trained and financially rewarded teachers together with a decline in the perceived value of teaching as a profession
- Poor literacy and numeracy
- Lack of clear pathways to enable lifelong learning.

Promoting Quality Education

Respondents called for more dialogue on quality education, engaging educational institutions, government, employers and the community to assess the needs of society and the part that quality education contributes to meeting those needs. The following suggestions were made:

- Professionals to advocate for more government schools, better teacher training, multi media centers so that teachers can have access to the internet
- Fundraising for scholarships to deserving children from poor backgrounds and orphans of HIV.

- All parents should be encouraged to be first teachers, mentors, and contribute to character building in their children. There should be more collaboration between parents and teachers.
- National Federations and Associations (NFAs) can give support to government programmes for free lunches, sports, and scholarships, in-service training for teachers, better salaries for teachers and removal of taxes (VAT) on scholastic materials like books, uniforms, television, and food.
- Raise awareness of the general public, especially in rural communities, on the value of education, including for the girl child.
- Improvement of the rural communities in the areas of power provision, water, health facilities and adequate roads to reduce the need for child labour.
- Establish effective management of schools and proper information flow systems between government, schools and the community.
- Create more entrepreneurial schools and adult schools of learning on wealth creation
- NFAs should highlight issues of the 21st Century for the curriculum like awareness of the need to protect the environment, focus on unequal access to resources.
- Provide early childhood education
- Establish schools for teenaged parents with arrangements for their babies to be nearby as parents attend class
- Provide access to the knowledge and skills needed to earn a family sustaining wage and lead fulfilling and productive lives. This is where the provision of quality education from pre-school to the tertiary education lays the foundations for life long learning.

These many suggestions can be summed up as recognizing that the provision of quality education is the responsibility of the state, the professionals, parents, students and the community working together. As a Rwanda contributor put it, "NFAs should work with education ministries, administrators, parents, teachers and teacher unions to transform education. By building capacity in national administrators and policy makers, a vision of the future needs of education can be identified."

UNICEF (2000) and UNESCO (2004) recognize five dimensions of education quality:

- Learner
- Environment
- Context
- Priorities
- Outcomes

All are founded on the rights of the whole child and of all children, enabling them to survive and be protected and providing for their development and participation. The challenge is to create the situation in which each of these dimensions can be achieved for all children regardless of where they live.

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