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Education, The Key To Change?

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In order to meet the worldwide challenge of education for all, implementation of comprehensive, consistent, effective strategy on the one hand, and a firmer commitment by government and all the partners on the other, are needed to broaden access to primary education for all children and to develop new educational approaches.

"In the past, and especially in Africa, there was a close link between traditional learning and the fundamental needs of each community. The wise men of the village were able to pass on know-how and a set of values needed to perpetuate the way of life. Emphasis was placed on collective rather than individual abilities. Today, high population growth rates and general economic decline jeopardise the future of families and children. The decline in the system of mutual aid within families, particularly in towns and cities, has made children more vulnerable than ever. The lack of stimulation and backing deprives the present generations of support from the family received by children in the old traditional society. For this reason, education itself assumes greater importance, since it is a matter—at least in part—of replacing the functions previously performed by the family.

In December 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, 155 countries ratified the world Declaration on education for all. This Declaration stresses the need to place the emphasis on the acquisition of useful knowledge in primary school rather than on learning by rote and traditional teaching methods. It also stresses that governments and partners must find both suitable and innovative means of enabling as many people as possible to be reached. This new vision of education stresses the necessity of

More than 90% of children in the Third World start primary school. But in many countries, half of them abandon their studies before completing the four years of primary education, the minimum required for basic education.

incorporating—into Primary education—the basic knowledge children need to achieve a higher standard of living and to meet the challenges of a constantly changing environment more effectively.

This view therefore gives priority to the development of skills which prepare children to lead more independent lives. In this field, special efforts must be made for girls, for they are the group most often left on the sidelines in the formal sector.

Primary education is in a state of crisis in most Third World countries, essentially as a result of cuts in expenditure on education in the 1980s. The combined effects of economic decline and high population

growth rates led more or less everywhere to a deterioration in schooling conditions.

And when investment falls, books and equipment are no longer renewed and it is more difficult, if not impossible, for a school leaver to find a stable job. Hence the decline in enrolment rates since 1980 shows—in part—an acute loss of confidence in the relevance of the present system.

This crisis has today become almost general. The scope for governments to cater for the needs has declined. More classrooms and buildings would be needed every year to enable every child of school age to be given a place at a school. The reason for the failure of a large

number of reforms to education systems also doubtless lies in the fact that they were confined solely to the teaching field. The failure to appreciate the impact of demographic or economic factors has gradually compartmentalised the education systems, which are anxious to perpetuate their own existence, without considering the real problem of how they are to fit into the economic system and be most effective within it.

Finally, failure to take sufficient account of the links between the development process and education has resulted, in specific, limited approaches which have prevented the issues being dealt with as a whole. The various aspects of development cannot be dealt with effectively without considering a radical overhaul of educational systems.

(To be continued)