



CONFERENCE OF NGOS IN CONSULTATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE  
UNITED NATIONS - CoNGO

CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT FORUM (CSDF) 2011

GENEVA COMPONENT

Geneva, June 29, 30, July 1, 2011

“Civil Society’s essential role in achieving education for all”

A collective preparation for Civil Society input to the UN.ECOSOC 2011 Annual Ministerial Review

Outcome Document

1. Representatives of member organizations of the Conference of Non-governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with the United Nations (CoNGO) and other civil society groups met in Geneva for the Civil Society Development Forum (CSDF) 2011 Main Component, in preparation for the UN.ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) taking place on July 4-8, 2011. The 2011 AMR is dealing with “Implementing the internationally-agreed goals and commitments in regard to education”, and the CSDF focused on “Civil Society’s essential role in achieving education for all”. CoNGO has organized such pre-ECOSOC Fora during the past decade.
2. The CSDF received warm messages of encouragement and partnership from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN.DESA) and the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG). The discussions were led off and inspired by excellent statements from
  - Manjit Dosanjh, International Federation of University Women and Guild of Service
  - Bob Harris, Education International, and former President of CoNGO
  - Jason Scorza, International Association of University Presidents and Fairleigh Dickinson University
  - Eunlim Chi, Kyung Hee University
  - Meena Kadhimi, Bahrain Women Association for Human Development
  - Addaia Marrades and Margarita Serra Mestre, Intervida
  - Liberato Bautista, United Methodist Church, and former President of CoNGO
  - Royston Flude, CMDC-SPOC (Self-Sustaining Peoples, Organizations and Communities)

- Ilona Graenitz, former CoNGO Vice President, on behalf of the CoNGO Vienna community.

3. The CSDF met in plenary and in four working groups:

Education for development;

Education and decent work;

Young girls and women;

Vulnerable and minority groups.

The following outcomes are submitted to the attention of the Annual Ministerial Review and all participants in the ECOSOC Session, to call attention to some deep concerns and issues to which civil society attaches importance. The Outcome Document is also a work- paper for the wider civil society as it pursues on a daily, weekly and year-round basis its multiple advocacy and operational roles to achieve the implementation of international and national goals and commitments in regard to education.

4. Education For All and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) relating to education were

at the core of the deliberations at the CSDF, it being frequently underscored that the MDGs are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. The 2015 deadline for achieving the MDGs is perilously close, and while many significant gains have been registered, there are alarming gaps in many sectors and many geographical areas. The urgent plea - the urgent demand - of civil society is that governments fully live up to the promises they have made through adopting the MDGs. There is time - but only just - to close some of the gaps, and thousands of civil society organizations internationally and throughout the world are working with governments and communities to ensure that people's needs and aspirations are met in education as in all other sectors. Civil society will not relax on commitments and initiatives. But it is plain and undisputed that the primary responsibility rests with governments, from whom we expect renewed political courage, revitalized political determination, and enlightened political budgetary decisions. Achieving the MDGs in education and all other areas is not solely a matter of financial resources, but without the commitment of additional finance the gaps will not be closed. Achieving the MDGs in regard to education does not only concern Ministries of Education but also Ministries of Finance ( for budgets , including teachers' salaries and training allocations), and Ministries of Infrastructure/Equipment (for school and teacher-training buildings, roads in rural areas, investment in information technologies).

5. Achieving the education and other MDGs is a high policy matter that must be on the agendas of Cabinet Meetings, prepared in depth by inter-ministerial Cabinet Committees. In short, the firm commitments made by Heads of State and Government in adopting the Millennium Declaration, followed by the MDGs and relevant international Conventions and other legal instruments need to be unfailingly implemented down the governmental chain of authority. Local governments are also part of that chain and need to be brought fully into the consultative and implementation processes, most particularly when they have devolved authority in the areas of taxation and investment. Civil society is frequently in close proximity to local government and will often be a natural and competent partner for translating MDG commitments, through solidarity, down to the local level.

6. The nexus that joins education and development is critical and must be clarified: what kind of education and what kind of development are we aspiring to? We need to broaden the notion of education away from the concept that the foremost purpose of education is to

train children to be competitive in a changing world: this is grossly inadequate. Education involves appreciation of life and preparation for living in community, taking into account local and global solidarity and diversity of cultures. Education takes place not only in formal education systems, but throughout every part of daily life and the entire life cycle. We need a holistic approach to education, with curriculum including teaching literacy, numeracy, sciences, philosophy, arts, as well as the development of core values, virtues, and meta-consciousness. Education must not focus on the achievement, even prescription, of a specific model of “development”, but contribute to the transition to a sustainable development that is relevant to peoples and appropriate to their communities. Curriculum provides the framework for teaching; sustainable development provides the environment for lifelong learning.

7. MDG and Education for All targets are often construed and trumpeted in statistical terms. But statistics only tell part of the story, and may indeed often conceal the drama of the true story. Primary education enrolments may go up - which is naturally positive - but there may be inequalities in access as between girls and boys, or between social strata, or between urban and rural areas. In too many countries children, while statistically properly enrolled, may attend school infrequently or haphazardly, when they are required by their families to also be breadwinners many days per month or even per week. Governments are urged to look behind the statistics, to bring to light the types of ambient factors illustrated above, and to ensure that the administrative mechanisms are in place - and are funded - to iron out these inequalities and constraints.
8. Quantitative indicators do not necessarily reflect QUALITY in education. Education is laying the groundwork for coping and affirming in life (cultural life; economical life; family life; for some, life with disabilities; and life as participatory citizens - including as voters!). It must therefore be based on optimal standards of quality. Quality in education cannot be achieved without quality teaching. There is a need for worldwide additional targeted investment in quality teacher training, both for entrants to the teaching profession and through refresher courses while teachers are in service. Since classes of 50, 80 or more pupils are sadly all too frequent, government policies - notably financial policies - must encourage more university and college graduates to enter the teaching profession. Equally, the remuneration and pension arrangements for the teaching profession must be such as to encourage teachers to stay in it. The teaching profession must be honoured, recognized to be fulfilling, and acknowledged for its irreplaceable role in promoting a tolerant and culturally-conscious society. Teachers are the bedrock for achieving social cohesion and societal development. It is therefore in society's interest - and thus in a government's interest - that the teaching profession be among the nation's financial priorities.
9. QUALITY in education also needs to be monitored, both to ensure that standards are maintained and raised, and to contribute to eliminating disparities and inequalities. Assessment theories and procedures are increasingly known and elaborated but need to be much more widely applied. This is one of the areas where governments, local authorities, educational authorities should call upon institutions of higher education and of civil society to bring their research and other expertise to the table, also to achieve greater awareness and accountability. The dimensions of assessment include educational environments - including environments beyond the classroom - learners' cognitive and affective

development, and logical interpretation. None of this is a luxury only affordable in high-income societies: it is a contribution to problem-anticipation, to problem-solving, and thereby to quality education.

10. The internationally-agreed goals in regard to education are intimately tied in with internationally-agreed goals on women's rights, women's empowerment and gender equality. In still too many areas girls are "at the back of the queue" where inbuilt patriarchal attitudes may see them as unpaid house servants and/or marriage-consignees, thereby implicitly and explicitly denying their dignity, their rights and their potential. Immature marriage and immature pregnancy is just such a denial. Treating girls and women as easy prey for sexual violence is just such a denial. Overturning all such attitudes and practices - and in some places the laws or legal systems that back them up - must remain a top priority for parliamentarians, governments, educational and economic institutions, and civil society. In too many places humanity is still deprived of the social, economic, cultural, caring contributions of women. Justice cries out for action by all concerned: parliaments, government and judiciaries must not shirk their responsibilities nor shrink their commitments in this crucial area. Civil society will not relent in advancing this cause, not least because educated girls and women are the bedrock of humane, healthy and prosperous societies.
11. To achieve the MDGs and Education For All, to implement international and national standards and goals in education, we must always remember that all these targets and aspirations are not ceilings but base floors to build on. Engaged civil society organizations, based on their intensive grass roots experience, call already now on governments to set ambitious goals and targets for the post-2015 period. This will require greater inputs from universities and other institutions of higher education (viz the UN Academic Impact Initiative). The business sector must play an active socially-responsible role. The knowledge and diversity of local communities must be fully brought in. The collective experience of civil society will have to be brought together in innovative ways, avoiding duplication of words and deeds, and seeking explicit harmonization of effort.
12. Culture and education are intertwined concepts. Learning processes reflect and shape cultures, and education must acknowledge, foster and enrich diversity. An education that does not take into account culture and cultural diversity loses its legitimacy. Education must recognize the multiplicity and plurality of narratives of the world's peoples, including narratives of indigenous peoples and their right to their own ways of being, knowing and doing. Indigenous peoples have often suffered from educational systems based on assimilation, cancelling their cosmovisions, their languages and their traditions. The recognition of linguistic, cultural and religious minorities, and the recruitment of teachers belonging to such minorities, should be factored into assessments of the quality of education. We call upon governments to develop culturally appropriate educational mechanisms geared to the elimination of inequalities, especially affecting marginalized and vulnerable groups. Education must be focused to repudiate entrenched negative attitudes, perceptions and practices that maintain stigmatization and marginal status.
13. Education needs to be compatible with sustainable lifestyles and people's need to earn a livelihood and to engage in decent work upon completion of their education. People's aspiration is to become contributing and participating members of a developing society, in a world that is becoming increasingly technologically complex. Civil society organizations can

and will cooperate with educational systems to target and ensure the availability of resources that enhance youth preparedness for productive employment, including vocational education standards and infrastructures. Entrepreneurship is a skill that can be incubated, provided financial resources are made available.

14. Civil Society recalls the words of the United Nations Secretary General on the occasion of the MDG Summit: “Our world possesses the knowledge and the resources to achieve the MDGs. Our challenge today is to agree on an action agenda to achieve them.” Civil society is an indispensable partner with government in harnessing knowledge and resources, and in implementing the action agenda in the education arena and across all the MDGs. Civil Society will hold itself and governments to account for the successful further implementation of all internationally-agreed goals and commitments, so that they may become meaningful reality for the peoples of the world.

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