

## **Special Session between Ministers and NGOs**

**Thursday 5 December 2002**

### **Moderator:**

Honourable Minister of Education, Mr. Ameyaw Akumfi, Ghana

### **Panelists:**

- Mrs A. Bah-Diallo, Deputy Assistant Director General for Education of UNESCO
- Honourable Minister of Education and Culture of the United Republic of Tanzania, Mr. Mungai
- Honourable Minister of Education of Nigeria, Mr. Borishade
- Mr C. Abani, Nigeria, from the African Network Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA)

### **Introduction/background:**

The first Special session between Ministers of Education and NGOs was held in Geneva in September 2001, during the International Conference for Education. It identified four major roles for civil society organisations: (i) alternative service providers; (ii) critical thinkers and innovators; (iii) informed advocates; (iv) policy partners.

Several preconditions for effective civil society participation were identified:

- Strong commitment to all Dakar goals.
- Clear government policy for collaboration.
- Open, democratic and stable political systems.
- Mutual trust and transparency.
- Mechanisms for ongoing policy dialogue between governments and civil society.
- Capacity building for local NGOs.
- International solidarity in supporting national efforts.

Civil society has been invited to play an unprecedented role in the MINEDAF conferences. They have produced one of the official working documents, presenting the civil society perspectives and positions. This document was produced on the basis of a wide participatory process and finalized through a preparatory civil society regional consultation (Lilongwe, Malawi, October 2002). Furthermore, they have been invited to present their perspectives on education in Africa on all the panels.

This second special session on civil society participation in EFA organized within the MINEDAF VIII conference was intended to provide a forum for policy dialogue between Ministers of Education and Civil Society Organizations, with a view to promote a shared understanding of government-civil society partnerships for EFA and discuss strategies for an improved collaboration in the future.

### **Achievements/opportunities:**

Ministers and civil society representatives underlined the need and the gains to be won from a genuine partnership: the added value is tremendous.

During the debate, the requirements for genuine partnership between governments and civil society that were highlighted in Geneva were confirmed.

Elements such as the following were emphasized: trust, shared vision, respect, constructive and consistent dialogue, clear roles and responsibilities, balance of power, equal access to information, openness and transparency.

A number of achievements and examples of good practices were also highlighted:

- Participation of civil society representatives in government delegations to conferences
- The creation in countries of national civil society coalitions working in education, which enhances civil society influence and facilitates the interaction with the government, as a clear partner to work with
- The inclusion of NGOs in inter-ministerial advisory committees
- The participation of civil society in school governance in collaboration with local public authorities.
- The involvement of civil society organizations in the development of national EFA plans through workshops, representation on EFA forums as well as government plan for civil society involvement and a budget put aside for this.
- The appointment of National EFA coordinators and/or Education Ministers with a civil society background.
- Growing recognition of Regional Coalitions such as ANCEFA and the Global Campaign on Education (GCE)
- The process leading to the civil society participation in the MINEDAF VIII, the development of a civil society working document for the conference and the representation on all the panels.

### **Challenges/issues:**

Although progress has been made, civil society – government partnership is not always easy. Governments and civil society expressed difficulties in building partnerships, often similar for both partners. They face challenges such as:

- Non-existence of genuine partnerships in some countries
- Disorganization, lack of coordination and agreement among organisations of civil society in some countries.
- Suspicion between governments and civil.
- Unequal power relationships.
- Difficulty of addressing at the same time the process of civil society participation and ownership building and the product of education policies.

## **Recommendations:**

In the light of the discussion held, the following major recommendations were made:

### **Civil society organizations**

- Articulate their positions and perspectives more clearly
- Coordinate civil society actions and create coalitions
- Engage in a constructive dialogue with the government

### **Governments**

- Create systematic mechanisms to facilitate civil society participation in education policy formulation
- Include civil society participation in the EFA plan in terms of both strategies, activities and allocated budget
- Strengthen civil society capacities to empower them in participating in education policy formulation, planning, implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation
- Provide the necessary resources for capacity building and participation

### **UNESCO**

- Provide and mobilize resources for civil society capacity building and participation
- Encourage African governments to establish permanent mechanisms at national level to cooperate with NGOs/civil society in educational planning, implementation and evaluation
- Continue including African NGOs and civil society in EFA meetings and conferences at sub-regional, regional and international levels
- Continue to assist and cooperate closely with ANCEFA and other regional structures on all aspects of civil society participation, particularly in the framework of creating and strengthening national NGO coalitions.