One decade of Education for All: The challenge ahead

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I. Introduction[1]

"Jomtien will represent a real turning point in population trends, in human resource development, in economic growth, in rural and international migration patterns, in the formation of a new global vision if its targets are effectively attained. And this calls for new priorities in the agendas of nations, intergovernmental organizations and multinational enterprises. It presupposes a new blueprint for our common future. It demands a renewed faith in the UN system and a new commitment to disarmament. It implies sharing and reducing the intolerable gaps and asymmetries of today's world. It requires endogenous capacity-building. It means understanding that poverty, ignorance and marginalization are the roots of violence, extremism and conflict. It means a new dream — the dream UNESCO was created for: moral and intellectual solidarity throughout the world."

(Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO, EFA Forum, 1994:42).

The World Conference on *Education for All* was held at Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990. This event brought together representatives of governments, international agencies, non-governmental organizations, professional associations and leading personalities in the field of education from around the world. Some 155 governments signed a World Declaration and a Framework for Action, committing them to ensure *quality basic education for children, youth and adults.*

Four international organizations sponsored the Conference and formed an Inter-Agency Commission: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the World Bank. These organizations have been directly involved in the follow-up of the initiative.

1.This paper was widely circulated for comments, and discussed at a number of meetings held between March and September 1999. The initial version was presented at the international seminar "Primary Education at the End of the Decade: Curriculum Policies in Peru and Andean Countries" organized by TAREA in Lima on 3-6 March. An expanded version was presented at the Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society-CIES (Toronto, 14-18 April), at the "Nine Years After Jomtien" panel sponsored by CIDA. Also, I was invited to discuss the paper in Chile, at the Ministry of Education (Santiago, 17 June), Mexico ("First Forum for the Analysis and Monitoring of Education for All" organised by Ayuda en Acción-México, CESDER and FAI-Centro in Zautla, Puebla, 11-12 August), and Colombia (Regional Seminar for Education Focal Points convened by the UNICEF Regional Office, Bogota, 23-27 August). The paper was also discussed at an internal seminar at IIEP UNESCO Buenos Aires.

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This was not the first time that an important international conference had been organized on education, nor was it the first time that universal literacy and schooling had been targeted. The conferences in Karachi and Addis Ababa in the early 1960s — not to mention the conferences held previously in Bombay (1952), Cairo (1954) and Lima (1956) — had deemed both goals feasible by 1980. By 1990, however, statistics showed that there were over 100 million out-of-school children and over 900 million adult illiterates in the world. In a way, "the conference held in Thailand in March 1990 is an official recognition of the failure" (Bousquet, 1990:83) of previous international commitments and calls for action. However, as I will argue in this paper, Jomtien was not only an attempt to ensure *basic education* — the satisfaction of *basic learning needs* — for the world's population, but to redefine the vision and scope of *basic education*.

Education for All (EFA) served as a framework for the design and implementation of educational policies around the world, particularly in the field of basic education, during the 1990s. A series of meetings, both at the regional and global levels, were held on the initiative of the four Jomtien partners, through the International Consultative Forum on Education for All (EFA Forum). Coordinated by UNESCO, these meetings reviewed the progress of the program (see Box 1)[2].

Numerous activities were launched since mid-1998 to perform end-of-decade assessments. In late 1998 the EFA Forum issued a set of Technical Guidelines (printed material and two diskettes with data sheets and electronic calculation templates) to governments to help each country prepare a report on the 18 indicators considered relevant for the assessment (see Box 2). Surveys, case studies and interviews were also conducted in different countries, coordinated by UNESCO. Still pending is an assessment on actions carried out by the four international agencies that promoted EFA, with regard to the commitments and goals they set, both individually and collectively.

2. Since 1990, the EFA Forum held three global meetings to evaluate the progress of EFA: Paris (1991), New Delhi (1993) and Amman (1996). Each meeting was preceded by regional or subregional meetings and national round tables on EFA in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. Between 1993 and 1995, UNICEF and IIEP-UNESCO jointly organised a series of high-level regional and subregional seminars, attended by ministers and policy-makers, to share comments and information on the progress of EFA in their respective countries. These seminars were held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (April 1993) for sub-Saharan Africa; Kampala, Uganda (September 1993) for Southern and East Africa; Amman, Jordan (October 1994) for the Arab States, and Yangoon, Myanmar (March 1995) for Southeast Asia and the Pacific. (See Deblé & Carron, 1993; Wright & Govindra, 1994; Lorfing & Govinda, 1995; De Grauwe & Bernard, 1995). The only region where this type of seminar was not held was Latin America and the Caribbean. The documents and reports from both series of meetings EFA Forum and UNICEF/IIEP-UNESCO — constitute an important reference source for this paper.

On the eve of the twenty-first century, the world is experiencing a period of rapid change, major contradictions and great uncertainty; a period characterized as one of 'transition between two eras'[3]. The educational landscape is undergoing a prolonged crisis and there are numerous proposals and attempts to change the situation, both from above (system reforms) and from below (local innovations).

Education for All helped revitalize an education reform movement that started well before 1990 in several developing countries. Developments since 1990 are neither uniform nor linear. Major progress has been made on some fronts, whereas stagnation or even deterioration is manifest on others. Of course, there are significant differences between regions and countries, and within each country[4]. New problems have emerged from new solutions. The situation is not clear-cut; achievements are unstable and vulnerable. It is thus more appropriate to speak of *trends, tensions, dilemmas, contradictions* and *future challenges* rather than of *successes* and *failures, achievements* and *set-backs.*

It is too early to gauge the efficiency of the EFA initiative in terms of the goals set. Even if the results of the decade assessment (the 18 indicators) will be available in the year 2000[5], the real impact will only become apparent in a few years, not only due to the traditional delay of educational statistics

3. See M. Castells, *La era de la información. Economía, sociedad y cultura.* Three volumes, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1998.

4. The following statistical data were provided by the EFA Forum (1996c) as part of the mid-decade assessment (1990-1995):

- School enrolments in developing countries grew by 50 million pupils (from 496 million to 545 million), double the pace of growth in the 1980s. Regions with the highest growth rates were South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (33 million), followed by the Arab States (5 million), Latin America and the Caribbean (6 million) and East Asia (5 million).

- The number of out-of-school children fell from 128 million in 1990 to 109 million in 1995.

- Developing countries counted an estimated 872 million illiterate youth and adults, age 15 and over, representing some 4 million more than in 1990, of which 3 million were in sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States.

- School enrolments continued to drop or began dropping in several countries, such as Angola, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar, Rwanda and Uganda, in Africa; Korea, Iraq and Thailand, in Asia; and Ecuador, Jamaica and Uruguay, in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the case of Korea and Thailand, the EFA Forum's report suggested that the decline in enrolments could be related to the drop in the school-age population and the gradual standardisation of the school-entrance age of students (this may also be the case of Uruguay).

5. The procedure and timetable for the assessment process were defined as follows:

- April-September 1999: Country-level assessments organised by a co-ordinator appointed within the Education Ministry in each country.

- October 1999-February 2000: Regional EFA seminars, assisted by a technical sub-group co-ordinated by the respective UNESCO regional office.

- April 2000: World Education Forum, at which an Agenda for Education in the Twenty-First Century will be adopted.

(and to the quantitative and qualitative aspects these 18 indicators will not be able to cover), but also because of the time taken to perceive and process changes in the education field. However, analyses and assessments performed to date enable us to identify certain trends and draw some general conclusions, more in terms of qualitative aspects and processes, rather than quantitative results.

This paper does not intend to evaluate the adherence to quantitative goals set within the scope of EFA. It approaches Education for All as a *concept* and a *strategy,* rather than as a *goal* in itself. More specifically, it focuses on analyzing if, and to what extent, the renewed vision of education, educational policy and international cooperation in education that was outlined in Jomtien, has been achieved. Indeed, the "expanded vision of basic education" was inseparable from attaining the goals set.

I will argue in this paper that the original concepts, guiding principles and targets of EFA have "shrunk". The *expanded vision* of basic education espoused at Jomtien — central to the proposal and the most innovative and potentially revolutionary aspect of EFA — did not translate into the design (and practice) of educational policies and reforms implemented in the 1990s (see Box 3).

Manifest since the outset of EFA, this trend was perceived and pointed out by the EFA Forum on numerous occasions:

> "Thus, the concept of Education for All has definitely gained currency worldwide and has inspired numerous resolutions and policy statements, as well as legislation and educational planning. However, not all countries have matched the rhetoric with determined action, and many of those that are committed to EFA face difficult problems. Also, with few exceptions, the industrialized countries seem not yet to have realized that Education for All is relevant to them, too, and is something more than having all children enrolled in school. As the economy of these countries becomes increasingly information-based and geared to the world market, ever more sophisticated literacy and numeracy skills become essential in the workplace and in the community, thereby raising the level of basic learning needs.
>
> Despite its currency, Education for All is often misunderstood as "schooling for all" and is equated with Universal Primary Education — a long proclaimed goal of the international community. Furthermore, the important Jomtien concept of meeting basic learning needs has received much less attention than the effort to provide a school place for every child. The school curriculum is presumed to meet these needs, but very few countries have reported on efforts to define them. Since basic learning needs obviously change over a person's lifetime and evolve in each society over time, this important foundation for EFA certainly merits much more active — and continuous — attention than it has received so far. Perhaps partly due to these conceptual problems, the "expanded vision of basic education" contained in the 1990 *World Declaration on*

Education for All has been followed selectively. Most attention and resources have gone into increasing primary school enrollments and reducing gender disparities. Far less attention has been given to meeting the basic learning needs of adults and out-of-school youth. Although adult literacy rates continue to improve, the male-female gap is closing very slowly. The importance of early childhood development activities appears to be more widely appreciated, and there has been some expansion in provision, but the numbers of children served in developing countries are still very low. Finally, despite signs of concern about improving the quality of education and raising learning achievement, there is insufficient evidence of effective action being taken." (EFA Forum, 1996a: 43-44)[6]

The *"expanded vision"* and the concept of *basic education* were the result of a complex discussion and negotiation process involving the four EFA sponsors (Ahmed, 1997; Habte, 1997). UNESCO advocated a broad understanding of education, encompassing adult education. UNICEF stressed the need to include early childhood development and initial education within *basic education*. UNICEF and UNESCO defended the need to introduce flexible, diversified educational modalities, including non-formal education alternatives. The World Bank wanted to focus on the school system and primary education. UNDP did not adopt a particular stance on the issue[7].

Basic education was thus a term encompassing the visions, priorities and agendas of the international partners, national governments, and the national and international specialists who drafted the successive versions of the Jomtien documents. The term is inconsistent and contradictory, as shown in these documents and in the papers subsequently produced by the different agencies. Furthermore, the term was used in a particular (and different) manner in many countries prior to Jomtien; adding *"expanding vision"* did not help reconceptualize its meaning[8].

6. The Spanish translations of quotations taken from documents originally in English or French (see Bibliography) are mine, including quotations from the Jomtien texts — *World Declaration on Education For All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs.*

7. Education — viewed as the development of national capacities — is a fundamental element of Sustainable Human Development defended by UNDP. UNDP focuses its action on the basic education needs of certain groups, together with organisations such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). It promotes areas such as environmental education, monitoring and evaluation, and distance education programs over the radio. A study conducted by UNDP's Educational Development Centre in 1989 on education and training in developing countries recommended that UNDP assume three major roles to cooperate in education and training: (1) develop benchmarks and guides to define project proposals in these two areas (as the main funding agency in the United Nations system); (2) convene and organize a consultative group for education and training made up of representatives of the main donor agencies in these areas (as the coordinating agency in the United Nations system); and (3) promote the search for alternatives to the challenges posed by financial austerity (UNDP, 1989).

8. *Basic education* is used in most countries to refer to *general, elementary, compulsory or primary education,* and is commonly associated with childhood. These meanings have been maintained, together with a general trend to increase the number of years of compulsory education.

Given the influence of international agencies in the initiative and the global leadership of EFA, and increasingly, in the formulation, funding and implementation of educational policy in developing countries, it is difficult to separate the role of agencies from that of countries in the development of EFA and its results. This paper therefore deals with both -- countries and international agencies.

Box 1

Meetings of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All (EFA Forum):

Taking the pulse of post-Jomtien progress

The International Consultative Forum on Education for All (EFA Forum) was set up after the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien as an inter-agency body to guide follow-up action for EFA at the global level. The EFA Forum brought together governments, multilateral and bilateral agencies and non-governmental organizations. It was designed to serve as an informal forum for consultation and exchange of information among EFA stakeholders.

The first global meeting of the EFA Forum was held in Paris from 4 to 6 December 1991 to analyze the achievements of countries and funding agencies since 1990. It focused on the target of universal primary education and included an estimate of costs.

The Second Meeting (New Delhi, 8-10 September 1993) centered on the quality of basic education. After reviewing progress made over the first two years, the meeting pointed out that:

• Nearly 120 developing countries had reported post-Jomtien follow-up measures: 77 had organized national EFA meetings, 105 had set goals for the 1990s and 109 had defined EFA strategies or plans of action. Only 56 countries had implemented a mechanism to promote or monitor the progress of objectives, and 13 had significantly increased the budget for basic education.

• The majority of industrialized countries had not taken any follow-up measures for EFA goals. The understanding was that EFA only applied to the developing world, and to industrialized countries solely as donors.

• With regard to the Jomtien partners' financial commitments: the World Bank had doubled its loans for basic education (from US$500 million in 1990 to US$1 billion in 1993), as had UNDP (two-thirds of its programs for 1992-1996 included basic education); UNICEF slightly increased its initial commitment to allocate 25% of its budget to basic education by the year 2000; UNESCO, which is not a funding agency, had expanded and placed priority on its literacy and basic education activities.

• The Second Meeting reiterated the importance of the commitments and underlined the urgency to accelerate measures to attain the goals, and, in particular, to ensure equitable access to schooling by both boys and girls. If urgent measures were not taken -- it warned -- the gender gap would continue to widen, particularly in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

• The Third Meeting (Amman, 16-19 June 1996) involved a mid-decade assessment of progress in an "climate of moderate optimism" and came to the following major conclusions:

• Achievements: There were educational advances in all regions, particularly in terms of access to primary education, although progress was slow and not as widespread as had been hoped. The number of out-of-school children aged between 6 and 11

had declined. There was a growing emphasis on the quality of education, serious reflection, more rigorous planning and a spirit of innovation.

• Shortfalls: The "expanded vision" of basic education was often reduced to "putting more children into school". Progress towards equitable access to education and the quality of girls' and women's education had been particularly slow. Early childhood care and development and pre-school education, as well as out-of-school education programs for adolescents and adults, had remained seriously under-developed and under-supported in many countries. There was a tendency to focus on primary education without recognizing its essential links to secondary and higher education, as well as to teacher training and the development of technical and vocational skills.

The final communiqué of the Mid-Decade Meeting concluded that there is *"no room for complacency. Continued progress requires even more forceful and concerted action, based on good information, sound research and careful analysis and aimed at achieving clearly specified results".* It invited the international community to strengthen financial support, inter-agency coordination and flexibility to respond to the needs of countries.

Sources:

- EFA Forum, *Quality Education for All. Final Report* (Second Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All), Paris, UNESCO, 1994.
- EFA Forum, *Education for All: Achieving the Goal. Final Report* (Mid-Decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All), Paris, UNESCO, 1996.
- UNESCO, *Education for All, Status and Trends,* Paris, 1993.
- UNICEF, *Education News,* "Special Issue: Six Years After Jomtien", No. 17-18, New York, 1997.

Box 2

Core indicators to assess one decade of Education for All

Indicator 1	Gross enrollment in early childhood development programs, including public, private, and community programs, expressed as a percentage of the official age-group concerned, if any, otherwise the age-group 3 to 5.
Indicator 2	Percentage of new entrants to primary grade 1 who have attended some form of organized early childhood development program.
Indicator 3	Apparent (gross) intake rate: new entrants in primary grade 1 as a percentage of the population of official entry age.
Indicator 4	Net intake rate: new entrants to primary grade 1 who are of the official primary school-entrance age as a percentage of the corresponding population.
Indicator 5	Gross enrollment ratio
Indicator 6	Net enrollment ratio
Indicator 7	Public current expenditure on primary education a) as a percentage of GNP; and b) per pupil, as a percentage of GNP per capita.
Indicator 8	Public expenditure on primary education as a percentage of total public expenditure on education.
Indicator 9	Percentage of primary school teachers having the required academic qualifications.
Indicator 10	Percentage of primary school teachers who are certified to teach according to national standards.
Indicator 11	Pupil-teacher ratio.
Indicator 12	Repetition rates by grade.
Indicator 13	Survival rate to grade 5 (percentage of a pupil cohort actually reaching grade 5).
Indicator 14	Coefficient of efficiency (ideal number of pupil years needed for a cohort to complete the primary cycle, expressed as a percentage of the actual number of pupil-years).
Indicator 15	Percentage of pupils having reached at least grade 4 of primary schooling who master a set of nationally defined basic learning competencies.
Indicator 16	Literacy rate of 15-24 year olds.
Indicator 17	Adult literacy rate: percentage of the population aged 15+ that is literate.
Indicator 18	Literacy Gender Parity Index: ratio of female to male literacy rates.

Source:
EFA Forum, *Education for All The Year 2000 Assessment. Technical Guidelines,* Paris, UNESCO, 1998.

Box 3

Basic Education

RESTRICTED VISION (Conventional)	**EXPANDED VISION** (Education for All)
Directed at children	Directed at children, youth and adults
Takes place in schools	Takes place inside and outside schools
Restricted to a period in a person's life	Lifelong and begins at birth
Equates with primary education or a pre-established level of education	Is not measured by the number of years of study or certificates attained, but by what is effectively learned
Responds to the teaching of specific subjects	Responds to the satisfaction of basic learning needs
Recognizes only one type of knowledge: that acquired in the school system	Recognizes the validity of all types of knowledge, including traditional knowledge
Is uniform for all	Is diversified (basic learning needs are different in different groups and cultures, as are the means and modalities to meet such needs)
Is static ("change" takes the form of periodic school and curriculum reforms)	Is dynamic and changes with the passage of time (education reform is permanent)
Supply-driven (institution, school system and administration)	Demand-driven (students, family, social demands)
Focuses on teaching	Focuses on learning
Is the responsibility of the Education Ministry (education as a sector and a sectoral responsibility)	Involves all ministries and government bodies in charge of education (requires multisectoral policies)
Is the responsibility of the State	Is the responsibility of the State and the whole society, thus demanding consensus-building and co-ordination of actions

Source:

J.L. Coraggio and R.M. Torres, *La educación según el Banco Mundial. Un análisis de sus propuestas y métodos*, [Education According to the World Bank. An Analysis of its Proposals and Methods], Buenos Aires, CEM-Miño & Dávila Editores, 1997.

II. Education for All: The proposal[9]

1. Every person — child, youth and adult — shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning. The scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and cultures, and inevitably, changes with the passage of time.

2. The satisfaction of these needs empowers individuals in any society and confers upon them a responsibility to respect and build upon their collective cultural, linguistic and spiritual heritage, to promote the education of others, to further the cause of social justice, to achieve environmental protection, to be tolerant towards social, political and religious systems which differ from their own, ensuring that commonly accepted humanistic values and human rights are upheld, and to work for international peace and solidarity in an interdependent world.

3. Another and no less fundamental aim of educational development is the transmission and enrichment of common cultural and moral values. It is in these values that the individual and society find their identity and worth.

4. Basic education is more than an end in itself. It is the foundation for lifelong learning and human development on which countries may build, systematically, further levels and types of education and training.

(Article 1, World Declaration on Education for All)

Background: Basic education throughout the world in 1990

To understand the urgency of Education for All and the emphasis on *basic education,* we must review the situation of basic education around the world in early 1990, as outlined in the Jomtien Declaration:

9. See Inter-Agency Commission of the World Conference on Education for All. 1990b. *World Declaration on Education For All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs,* World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, March 1990). New York, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank.

- More than 100 million children, including at least 60 million girls, did not have access to primary schooling;
- More than 960 million adults, two-thirds of them women, were illiterate, and there was an undetermined number of *functional illiterates* (i.e. people with precarious reading and writing skills, insufficient to use them effectively on a daily basis);
- More than one-third of the world's adults did not have access to information and basic knowledge that could improve the quality of their lives.
- More than 100 million children and countless adults failed to complete the primary school cycle; millions more satisfied the attendance requirements but did not acquire essential knowledge and skills.

In other words, despite significant increases in school enrollments in every region of the world and in the majority of countries over the past three decades, basic education for all was still a major challenge.

The World Conference on Education for All put education back on the agenda and made an appeal to the international community to recognize the importance and priority of *basic education.*

Education for All is equivalent to Basic Education for All. *Basic education* is education capable of meeting the *basic learning needs* of children, youth and adults. These *basic learning needs* comprise both essential learning tools and knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes required by human beings at all times to be able to meet their basic needs in order to 1) survive; 2) develop their full capacities; 3) live and work in dignity; 4) participate fully in development; 5) improve the quality of their lives; 6) make informed decisions, and 7) continue learning.

It was recognized that different groups have different basic needs, and consequently, different basic learning needs (BLN), as well as different ways of meeting such needs. BLN vary with individual countries and cultures, social groups and population categories (according to race, age, gender, culture, religion, territory, etc.) and with the passage of time. Thus, both content and pedagogy must be constantly reviewed and updated.

Basic education, as it was (re)defined at Jomtien, does not equate with *primary education*, nor does it take place solely within schools. Other educational and learning environments are involved in meeting basic learning needs, such as families, communities, and mass media.

Within basic education, priority was placed on *primary education* - and, in particular, on the goal of *universalization of primary education* - which was considered the *"cutting edge"* and reaffirmed as the *"main delivery system for the basic education of children outside the family".*

The **strategies** defined at the Conference included:

- **Meeting the basic learning needs of all** — children, youth and adults — recognizing that they have different learning needs, which demand different teaching and learning content, methods and modalities.
- **Giving priority to girls and women,** removing every obstacle that hampers their active participation and eliminating all gender stereotyping in education.
- **According special attention to the learning needs of the disabled and the disadvantaged,** facilitating learning and taking steps to provide equal access to education.
- **Focusing on learning,** rather than exclusively on participation in organized programs and completion of certification, assuring learning acquisition for children, youth and adults to *"achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning"* for all and *"improve and apply systems of assessing learning achievement".*
- **Enhancing the environment for learning.** Societies must ensure that all learners — children, youth and adults — receive the nutrition, health care and general physical and emotional support they need in order to participate actively in, and benefit from, their education.
- **Strengthening partnerships.** Governments and educational authorities have a unique obligation to provide basic education for all, but new and revitalized partnerships at all levels will be necessary: government and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, local communities, religious groups and families. The status of teachers must be urgently improved.
- **Broadening the means and scope of basic education,** by adopting an *"expanded vision"* of basic education that is not restricted to a certain period (childhood), a specific institution (school) or a single type of knowledge (official school curriculum); acknowledges that learning begins at birth and is lifelong; recognizes the value and validity of traditional knowledge and indigenous cultural heritage of each social group; and goes beyond schooling (family life, community, workplace, communication media, etc.), involving non-formal education and informal learning (see Box 3).

Goals and requirements

The following **goals** were defined at Jomtien:

1. Expansion of early childhood care and developmental activities, including family and community interventions, especially for poor, disadvantaged and disabled children.
2. Universal access to, and completion of, primary education (or whatever higher level of education is considered "basic") by the year 2000.
3. Improvement in learning achievement such that an agreed percentage of an appropriate age cohort (e. g. 80% of 14 year-olds) attains or surpasses a defined level of necessary learning achievement.
4. Reduction of the adult illiteracy rate (the appropriate age group to be determined in each country) to, say, one-half its 1990 level by the year 2000, with sufficient emphasis on female literacy to significantly reduce the current disparity between male and female illiteracy rates.
5. Expansion of provisions of basic education and training in other essential skills required by youth and adults, with program effectiveness assessed in terms of behavioral changes and impacts on health, employment and productivity.
6. Increased acquisition by individuals and families of the knowledge, skills and values required for better living and sound and sustainable development, made available through all education channels including the mass media, other forms of modern and traditional communication, and social action, with effectiveness assessed in terms of behavioral change.

The Conference concluded that a set of **requirements** were necessary to achieve these goals:

- *Developing a supportive policy context* in the social, economic and cultural sectors.
- *Mobilizing public, private and voluntary financial resources,* recognizing that time, energy and funding for basic education are perhaps the most profound investment in people and in the future of a country which can be made.
- *Strengthening international solidarity* by promoting equitable and fair economic relations in order to redress existing economic disparities

between nations. Least developed and low-income countries have special needs which require priority in international support for basic education. All nations must also work together to resolve conflicts and strife and create a stable and peaceful environment.

III. Education for All: The response

Education for All received attention from the entire world, particularly from governments and policy - makers in developing countries. However, despite the wide coverage of the Conference and its initial publications, EFA did not reach the intermediary and lower levels of the education community -- teachers in particular -- and the general population.

EFA coincided with, or helped launch (or re-launch), an important reform movement surrounding basic education. It tapped into new human and financial resources at both the national and international levels. New programs and projects — many of them innovative — were introduced in an overall context that fostered innovation and experimentation.

EFA revived a number of ambitious education goals, some of them with potential to transform the education sector. The focus on education for girls and women led to greater awareness of the problem of gender disparity; numerous countries implemented policies and strategies to address the issue. Emphasis on matters such as assessment, learning, monitoring and information translated into initiatives which were often subregional or even inter-regional. The unreliability of educational statistics, or the absence of such statistics in many countries, engendered concern, and concrete efforts were made to improve current systems to collect and analyze statistical data related to the school system[10].

The 1990s were a prolific period for studies and publications on education, in general, and basic education, in particular. Funding patterns were discussed, and some times altered, in favor of basic education by both agencies and governments. International organizations, and particularly the EFA partners, tested new scenarios and mechanisms in the difficult field of inter-agency cooperation.

By the end of the decade, however, there is a yawning gap between progress made and progress that should have been made to reach projected goals, or at least the two goals that were expressly set for the year 2000: universal access to, and completion of, primary education, and a reduction of the adult illiteracy rate to one-half its 1990 level.

10. There were no updated, reliable education statistics in 1990. The problem remains a decade later, but progress has been made in certain countries and at the international level.

The various interpretations of the *Education for All* proposal

In a paper prepared in early 1992 for a Latin American seminar organized by UNESCO-OREALC and IDRC in Santiago de Chile to follow up the Jomtien Conference, I claimed that the "Education for All" proposal could -- and would -- lead to most diverse interpretations (Torres, 1993)[11].

> "The Education for All initiative can -- and is already -- interpreted in many different ways. It can be understood as an invitation to continue doing what was going to be done anyway, or as a call for a sweeping revolution in education. In fact, each of the Jomtien articles can be interpreted and implemented in very different ways:
>
> • **Meeting basic learning needs**
>
> This can be interpreted as a minor commitment designed to guarantee the population elementary knowledge to face practical problems linked to survival, the immediate context, daily life and local affairs.
>
> Or "basic" can be understood as going beyond mere survival and instrumental knowledge, assuming that what is at stake is not only life but the quality of life of the population.
>
> • **Expanding the vision of basic education**
>
> This can be understood as increasing the number of years spent at primary school, adding one or two years at lower levels (pre-school) or upper levels (post-primary or secondary).
>
> Or it can be understood as a new vision of education, in which "expanded" also means lifelong and lifewide, inside and outside the school system.
>
> • **Universalizing access to basic education**
>
> This can lead to frenziedly putting children in school, perpetrating the history of quantity without quality, enrollments without retention, and teaching without learning.
>
> Or it can lead to rethinking and redesigning educational policies and strategies to create effective access opportunities for all, especially for the poor and the disadvantaged, guaranteeing essential conditions for staying and learning at school.

11. R.M. Torres, ¿Qué (y cómo) es necesario aprender? Necesidades básicas de aprendizaje y contenidos curriculares [What (and how) is it necessary to learn? Basic learning needs and curriculum content]. In: Necesidades básicas de aprendizaje: Estrategias de acción, Santiago, UNESCO-OREALC/IDRC, 1993. This was one of the three working papers analyzed at the "Action Strategies to Meet Basic Learning Needs" *(Estrategias de Acción para la Satisfacción de Necesidades Básicas de Aprendizaje)* regional seminar, which served as a Latin American follow-up to the World Conference on Education for All.

- **Focusing on learning**

One could say that there is nothing new about this and that it is what the school system has always done; or understand that what has to be done is to increase the amount of information pupils learn, or time spent in class, or the number of exams, or simply continue to assume, as has been done in the past, that what is taught is learned.

Or, on the other hand, one could accept that focusing on learning involves a radical departure from conventional pedagogy, as it implies centering on the learner, changing assessment systems, showing effective learning results, and being responsible for them before parents, local community and society at large.

- **Broadening the means and scope of basic education**

This can be understood as simply calling on the mass media to help the school system.

Or it can be understood as a call to diversify contexts, modalities and methods of teaching and learning, rather than adopt a single, uniform model; to recognize the importance of initial education and adult education, the synergies between formal, non-formal and informal learning, the need to stop isolating education and to link it with other areas that are also basic (economy, work, health, nutrition, environment, etc.).

- **Enhancing the environment for learning**

This can be understood as enhancing the school environment (renovating buildings, cleaning classrooms, providing textbooks, etc.).

Or it can be understood as enhancing the overall economic, social and cultural environment that impacts on learning, which means guaranteeing learners (and teachers) the basic objective and subjective conditions for learning (and teaching).

- **Strengthening partnerships**

This can be interpreted as organizing conferences and seminars on education, signing agreements and declarations, and multiplying inter-ministerial organizations, committees and commissions.

Or it can be interpreted as establishing an ongoing process of information, communication and social action to seek an active national consensus on education, involving the entire population, all sectors and institutions (State, families, teachers and teacher unions, local communities, religious groups, private enterprise, non-governmental organizations), at all educa-

tional levels (local, regional and national authorities; principals and teaching and administrative personnel) in an open debate to undertake joint efforts.

- **Education for all**

Finally, this can be understood as a new fashion or another demagogic watchword, or worse, as an invitation to artificially inflate statistics to show that goals have been attained.

Or it can be interpreted as a genuine attempt and a new commitment to achieve quality basic education for all.

Education for all "shrank"

Unfortunately, although perhaps predictably, the interpretations of EFA that prevailed and translated into policies and programs in the 1990s are more along the lines of the tradition of *preserving* and *improving,* rather than the challenge of *rethinking* and *transforming.*

Faced with rapidly approaching deadlines and national and international pressure to produce results within given timeframes, Education for All increasingly adopted a minimalist approach and favored facile, fast and short-term solutions, with a focus on quantity rather than quality. The *"expanded vision"* of basic education and its ambitious goals for quality education for all have, in many respects, "shrunk" (see Box 4). In other words, the *"expanded vision" of basic education* — which is actually an expanded and renewed vision of education in general — has not (yet) been put into practice.

Box 4

Education for All

PROPOSAL	RESPONSE
1. Education for *all*	1. Education for *children (the poorest among the poor)*
2. *Basic* education	2. *Schooling* (and *primary* education)
3. Universalizing basic education	3. Universalizing access to primary education
4. *Basic* learning needs	4. *Minimum* learning needs
5. Focusing on *learning*	5. Enhancing and assessing *school performance*
6. Expanding the *vision* of *basic* education	6. Increasing the duration (number of years) of *compulsory schooling*
7. Basic education as the *foundation for lifelong learning*	7. Basic education as an *end in itself*
8. Enhancing the *environment* for learning	8. Enhancing the *schoolenvironment*
9. *All* countries	9. *Developing countries*
10. Responsibility of *countries* (government and civil society) and the *international community*	10. Responsibility of *countries*

The list of 18 indicators selected and defined to assess one decade of Education for All reflects this "downscaling" both in terms of the concept and expectations of EFA:

- Conventional quantitative education/school indicators predominate, with a focus on access and enrollments at the primary school level, while key elements of EFA that are not related to the school system are excluded (for example, the educational role of the family and communication media, the importance of public information and messages aimed at meeting the basic learning needs of the population, etc.).
- The indicators refer exclusively to the *education sector,* depicted in an isolated manner. EFA stressed the need for an intersectoral focus and

support policies (health, nutrition, employment, etc.) to enhance the learning environment of school-age children, their families and the population at large.

- The period during which many indicators are measured (such as drop-out rates and learning achievement) essentially covers the *first four years of primary school,* not even all of primary school. The notion of *basic education* adopted by EFA was not restricted to the school system or a specific number of years of study. It did, however, recommend a period of at least eight or nine years of exposure to systematic education.
- The indicators for youth and adult education are still centered on *literacy* (traditionally defined as "knowing how to read and write"), and not on the *basic education of youth and adults* in a broad sense (meeting basic learning needs).
- The status and quality of teaching is measured by two indicators, both focused on *formal qualifications.*
- There is only *one indicator for learning,* the linchpin of the Jomtien proposal, and it is defined in an extremely broad sense -- mastering "a set of nationally defined basic learning competencies".
- The set of indicators refer to *countries' adherence to the commitments.* No indicators refer to the satisfaction of commitments by international agencies involved in EFA. This evidently serves as an assessment conducted *by agencies on countries,* but does not allow *countries to assess agencies* or agencies to assess each other.

1. From education for ***all*** to the education of ***children*** *(the poorest among the poor)*

- "*Basic education should be provided to all children, youth and adults. To this end, basic education services of quality should be expanded and consistent measures must be taken to reduce disparities."* (Article 3, Universalizing Access and Promoting Equity)
- "*Knowledge and skills that will enhance the learning environment of children should be integrated into community learning programs for adults. The education of children and their parents or other caretakers is mutually supportive and this interaction should be used to create, for all, a learning environment of vibrancy and warmth."* (Article 6, Enhancing the Environment for Learning)

EFA made a significant step in recognizing that everyone — children, youth and adults — have basic learning needs to be met and that these needs are interrelated, thereby incorporating child and adult education, as well as school and out-of-school education, under the umbrella concept of *basic education.* At the same time, it advocated a special focus on girls and women, and "poor, disadvantaged and disabled" children.

In practice, *all* was substantially reduced to *children,* and not even *all children* but "disadvantaged", "poor", "vulnerable" children and children "in specially difficult circumstances" or "at risk", according to the different terms used, in line with the "focus on poverty", "positive discrimination" policies and "compensatory" programs that dominated social policy, and educational policy in particular, in developing countries over the last few years.

In fact, cost studies and estimates that accompanied and followed the EFA Conference exclusively referred to primary schooling. The commitment made at Jomtien was interpreted as a worldwide commitment to *"universal access to, and completion of, primary education by the year 2000"* (Colclough & Lewin, 1993:11). Estimations of financial viability of EFA never applied to the other goals set at Jomtien.

Youth and adult education has been sidelined in national and international educational policies[12]. The constant reference to adult education as a "support strategy" (for child schooling) is not yet a reality. According to the argument whereby children have to compete financially with the education of their parents, adult education lost out. Bilateral and multilateral organizations have openly discouraged investing in adult education, claiming scarce resources and past failures[13]. The Fifth UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), held in Hamburg in July 1998 and coordinated by UNESCO, does not appear to have altered this trend.

By identifying seven areas of basic needs common to all -- surviving,

12. I experienced this first-hand at UNICEF. The team of advisors formed in 1991 at UNICEF headquarters in New York to follow up Jomtien goals comprised five people: the head of the Education Cluster and four senior advisors, in charge respectively of early childhood development, primary education, girls' education, and non-formal education (for youth and adults). I was in charge of this last area. One year later, UNICEF decided to prioritize the goal of Universal Primary Education (UPE), making early childhood development and adult education "support strategies". *Non-formal education* was redefined in line with the goal of UPE, to encompass educational innovation at the school level (i.e. non-conventional, flexible, alternative primary education modalities). See *Reaching the Unreached: Non-Formal Approaches and Universal Primary Education,* New York, UNICEF, 1993a.

13. This is particularly true for adult literacy. In recent years, there has been a growing sentiment that adult literacy programmes in developing countries have not proven successful. However, this has been based largely on opinions and anecdotal information, rather than on assessments and scientific studies, which are still scarce and difficult to compare.

developing full capacities, living and working in dignity, participating fully in development, improving the quality of life, making informed decisions, and continuing to learn -- Jomtien recognized that adults with basic learning needs are not just the illiterate, that these needs go beyond literacy, although this is a goal in itself. However, *adult education* is still fundamentally understood as [adult] *literacy.* Furthermore, adult literacy was virtually wiped off the education agendas of many countries in the 1990s[14].

The goal of universal literacy (the much publicized "eradication of illiteracy") has been systematically declared and postponed the world over. The year 2000 appeared as a plausible horizon to achieve the target (Cárceles, 1990). However, given the current trends and circumstances, little progress can be expected even in EFA's more modest global goal that called for a *"reduction of the adult illiteracy rate to one-half its 1990 level by the year 2000"*[15].

The definition of "adult" for educational purposes has increasingly referred to *women* (policies and programs destined primarily — and sometimes exclusively — for women), *youth* (often the only target population is the youth population, restricted to the 15-24 age group) and *specific sectors* (programs directed at rural areas, indigenous groups, sectors considered productive, mothers, fertile women, adolescents at risk, etc.). At the same time, the notions of "youth" or "adolescent" still do not have their own status in many countries, and are assimilated in adult education.

Similarly, the two other targets of EFA regarding youth and adult education have not been reached, namely: the *"expansion of provisions of basic education and training in other essential skills"* and the development of a broad information and public education strategy to ensure *"increased acquisition by individuals and families of the knowledge, skills and values required for better living and sound and sustainable development, made available through all education channels",* including the mass media. In fact, follow-up measures and indicators to evaluate this type of intervention have not been developed within the scope of EFA. Among the 18 assessment indicators, there is not one designed specifically to assess this target or the effectiveness of actions *"in terms of behavioral change",* as the (remarkably naive) terms of the EFA World Declaration propound.

14. Jones and other authors partly blame UNESCO for relegating literacy/adult education to the sidelines. As of the second half of the 1970s, in a climate of increasing fiscal austerity, UNESCO would have overlooked its traditional priority on this area. Also, it has been pointed out that UNESCO had *"insufficient theoretical rigour in defining and implementing different and successive strategies aimed at adult literacy"* [Translator's note: suggested translation of quote] (Jones, 1988).

15. The Mid-Decade Meeting of the EFA Forum (1996) pointed out: *"There are some 900 million adult illiterates in the world, nearly two-thirds of them women. In all societies, the best predictor of the learning achievement of children is the education and literacy level of their parents. Investments in adult education and literacy are, thus, investments in the education of entire families."* (Amman Affirmation, 1996)

This is problematic, not only because youth and adult education have been abandoned, but because it shows a narrow vision of the goal — deemed priority — of universal primary education. Overlooking adult education implies once again disregarding *educational demand* and denying the importance of the family as fundamental support for children's well-being and learning, and as a key factor in school learning achievement. Educating parents and other adults in the community is essential for Basic Education for All Children. Educating teachers is a *sine qua non* condition for improving teaching (and students' learning) conditions.

Moreover, the "focus on poverty" has ended up reducing *education* and educational policy and reform to the *education of the poorest,* as if problems in education and the need to "improve quality" only applied to public education and the education of the poor, and as if transforming schooling -- and the public school system itself -- were possible without building and thinking in terms of a national education project.

2. From ***basic*** education to ***schooling*** (and to ***primary*** education)

"The diversity, complexity, and changing nature of basic learning needs of children, youth and adults necessitates broadening and constantly redefining the scope of basic education to include the following components:

- Learning begins at birth. This calls for early childhood care and initial education. These can be provided through arrangements involving families, communities, or institutional programs, as appropriate.

- The main delivery system for the basic education of children outside the family is primary schooling. [...]

- The basic learning needs of youth and adults are diverse and should be met through a variety of delivery systems. [...]

- All available instruments and channels of information, communications, and social action could be used to help convey essential knowledge and inform and educate people on social issues. [...]

These components should constitute an integrated system — complementary, mutually reinforcing, and of comparable standards, and they should contribute to creating and developing possibilities for lifelong learning."

(Article 5, Broadening the Means and Scope of Basic Education)

One of the key, and potentially most generative, elements of the "expanded vision" of *basic education* is recognizing that education is a lifelong experience that begins at birth, crosses multiple learning environments, and

adopts different paths. While the school system was reaffirmed as the most important, widespread system to provide systematic education, and primary schooling as the "cutting edge" for basic education, the irreplaceable, complementary role of other education systems — the family, the community, work, mass media, conventional and modern teaching systems, etc. — was also underlined in meeting such basic learning needs.

However, this "expanded vision" has largely remained trapped in the EFA Declaration. *Education* policy and *education* reform continue to be equated with *school* policy and *school* reform. Conventional thinking in education has prevailed, and so has the association of *education* with *school education*, and *learning* with *schooling*[16], ignoring all other types of education and learning, the linkages between formal, non-formal and informal education, and the need for a unified strategy to ensure the development and transformation of education as a whole, and of school education in particular.

The educational role of the family, and family (basic) education, have not been further developed in policy or in practice. Initial or early childhood education (0-6 age group) and adult education alike lost ground in educational policies, and are essentially considered *compensatory strategies* for schooling, particularly among the poor. Adult education may attract attention if presented as *parent* education, due to the positive relationship identified between literacy, schooling and parent education — in particular, the education of mothers - and higher children enrollment, attendance, retention and school performance. Similarly, initial and pre-school education programs have been promoted as a preventive strategy against school failure among the poor --due to the positive relationship found by some studies between pre-school education and lower drop-out/repetition rates and higher school achievement rates -- rather than as a key component of early childhood development However, even this remedial function does not appear to be fully understood or expressed in school policies and strategies. Regions and countries that have traditionally made progress in these two areas (education/adult literacy and early childhood development/initial education) — such as Latin America and the Caribbean — have seen these programs downscaled or evencanceled.[17]

16. Indeed, the first draft of the World Declaration on Education for All (1990) stated that *"learning begins at school"*. The text was subsequently corrected to read as *"learning begins at birth"*. Altering the wording of this paragraph, however, did not necessarily mean altering the deeply-rooted belief that education and learning do begin at school.

17. *"Early childhood care and development, with its enormous potential and distinctive role in promoting the active learning capacities and the overall well-being and development of children, while receiving greatly increased attention, nonetheless remains seriously under-developed and under-supported in many countries."* (Amman Affirmation, 1996)

By focusing on primary education, education is once again equated with schooling and formal education.[18]

Non-formal education is still largely associated with adults. Jomtien gave impulse to so-called "non-formal primary education" programs, particularly in South Asia -- where this type of programs has been developed since the 1970s -- and also in a number of African countries, essentially supported by UNICEF and UNESCO.[19] The term *non-formal,* here, refers essentially to certain degrees of flexibility of schools (school calendar and timetables, curriculum, administration, etc.) to adapt to local and specific needs, particularly in rural and marginal urban settings. In fact, flexibility should not be considered an "innovation" but the *norm* in all schools. However, and despite their often genuine innovative features, "non-formal" programs, whether for children, youth or adults, usually have a low status in comparison with "formal" ("official") education programs. This leads to the reiteration of parallel networks (formal/non-formal, often coinciding with a state/NGO division) rather than to the co-ordination of efforts toward a unified strategy.

The Jomtien Conference and the international partners that promoted EFA bet heavily on the opportunities afforded by modern information and communication systems, and associated technologies, as key allies in meeting basic learning needs both inside and outside schools.[20] Overall, however, such expectations remain largely unmet, or at least not to the massive extent espoused at Jomtien.

Assuming that there are three educational "channels" -- corresponding to the conventional distinction between formal, non-formal and informal education

18. The participants of one of the assessment seminars in Africa stressed that *"...the dominant impression is that, given the difficult conditions under which countries find themselves, the Jomtien objective has marked a return to massive schooling operations, without leaving much room to explore new avenues."* (Deblé & Carron, 1993: 69)

19. A widely publicised model of this type of programme is that of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC).

20. Countless proposals were made from technology companies and experts. By way of example, a proposal was submitted to UNICEF in 1992 in response to the question of how to achieve universal primary education in India. The system proposed included a CPU (to replace the teacher) and portable battery-operated control devices for the students. The CPU would be installed with a basic operating program capable of accepting cartridges loaded with programmes organized by subject and level. Students would thus be able to progress at their own pace, working alone or in groups. The programs would be translated into the different teaching languages. Learning would be evaluated through an interactive system of questions and standardized exams. The advantages of the system were mentioned as: interactive learning, individual learning pace, creative and standardized teaching packages, a vast library accessible by each student by simply pressing a button, reusable software and hardware, flexible timetables, solar battery, combination of learning and playing, and lower costs than an inefficient school system (less that US$20 for each control device and US$500 for the CPU). The authors of the proposal estimated that, with the assistance of this system, India would be able to achieve universal primary education by the year 2000.

-- UNICEF introduced the term *"third channel"* in the EFA framework to refer to the use of *"modern and traditional communication, and social action"* for educational purposes (UNICEF, 1990:156; Mayo & Chieuw, 1993). In 1996 UNESCO launched *Learning Without Frontiers,* a supranational, transdisciplinary program designed to explore alternative technologies for learning capable of surpassing traditional barriers such as time, distance, age or circumstances (UNESCO/UNICEF, 1997). The World Bank has actively promoted distance education, both for classroom instruction and teacher training. In recent years much attention has been placed on integrating new technologies, particularly computers, in schools (although not on appraising and promoting traditional modalities and technologies, as was also stressed in the Jomtien Declaration). However, there is still no consistent body of research and experimentation to prove the comparative advantages of distance education, both in terms of cost and effectiveness, in the field of basic education[21]. There lies ahead a monumental task of teacher training to master new technologies, which are often integrated in schools without taking into account teachers' culture, learning and requirements.

While *basic* education tended to be reduced to *primary* education, there is also a trend to reduce the number of school years against which the progress of basic education in terms of EFA is measured. In most countries, the conventional primary education cycle lasts six years, but focus is increasingly turning toward the first four years (more concretely, "the first 4,000 hours", according to a UNESCO document) and even the first three grades. Completion of Grade 5 was selected by UNICEF as one of the indicators to follow up EFA and establish a league table of countries meeting this target and others set at the World Summit for Children (1990).[22] The majority of school performance appraisals made in recent years in Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and Africa use Grade 4 as a benchmark.[23] So does the indicator serving to measure learning in schools among the set of indicators established for the year 2000 assessment

3. From universalizing *basic* education to universalizing *access* to *primary* education

"Whether or not expanded educational opportunities will translate into meaningful development — for an individual or for society — depends ultimately onwhether people

21. See, for example, Klees, 1994; Nielsen & Tatto, 1991; Tatto, Nielsen & Cummings, 1991; Perraton, 1994.

22. See *The Progress of Nations,* published annually by UNICEF. See also *The State of the World's Children 1999,* devoted to education.

23. This is the case with two regional studies conducted by UNESCO in Latin America; one in 1993 among Grade 4 pupils in seven countries, and another in 1997 among Grade 3 and Grade 4 pupils in 15 countries.

actually learn as a result of those opportunities, i.e., whether they incorporate useful knowledge, reasoning ability, skills, and values. The focus of basic education must, therefore, be on actual learning acquisition and outcome, rather than exclusively upon enrollment, continued participation in organized programs and completion of certification requirements. Active and participatory approaches are particularly valuable in assuring learning acquisition and allowing learners to reach their fullest potential. It is, therefore, necessary to define acceptable levels of learning acquisition for educational programs and to improve and apply systems of assessing learning achievement." (Article 4, Focusing on Learning)

"Levels [of performance] should be consistent with the focus of basic education both on universalization of access and on learning acquisition, as joint and inseparable concerns." (Framework for Action, Goals and Targets)

Universalizing basic education continues essentially to be understood as *universalizing access to primary education* for children, not as universalizing *learning* and effectively meeting the basic learning needs of children, youth and adults, inside and outside school. This implies breaking away from a tradition that has focused its concern and data collection systems on access and enrollment indicators, failing to compile and analyze fundamental quantitative indicators such as repetition, drop-out and completion rates, and overlooking actual school life and functioning.[24]

The Jomtien Declaration emphasized the need to go beyond the vision of *access* as "universalization of primary education".[25] However, this is how the term continued to be defined in the glossaries, reports and documents issued by the international sponsors of EFA.[26]

In practice, as underscored at the mid-decade meeting of the EFA Forum, by 1996 emphasis was still placed on access and measures to increase

24. Note that the Human Development Indicators — established by UNDP to classify countries in its Human Development Report published annually since 1990 — determine the educational development and "educational achievement" of a country on the basis of two indicators: adult literacy rate, and combined gross enrolment ratio (primary, secondary and tertiary).

25. Universalization of primary education is traditionally defined as a gross enrolment ratio higher than 100 per cent. Gross enrolment ratio is defined as the total enrolment in primary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the officially defined primary school age-group. The cost estimates by Colclough & Lewin for primary schooling, within the scope of EFA, are based on the concept of *Schooling for All* (SFA), to which they add the quality variable, and define as *"the circumstance of having a school system in which all eligible children are enrolled in schools of at least minimally acceptable quality."* (Colclough & Lewin, 1993:2)

26. This is the case with declarations regularly made in and on Latin America. The affirmation that *"in East Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean primary education is almost universal"* (World Bank, 1995:15) obviously refers to enrolments. Both regions are characterised by high repetition and drop-out rates and low rates of completion of primary education. According to UNESCO estimates, only one-third of children that start Grade 1 stay in school and complete the primary cycle in Latin America.

access, rather than on attendance, retention and, more importantly, learning.[27] Once again, numbers have prevailed, alongside the logic of "quantity first, quality next" and the equation "if we ensure access to school, learning will logically follow". Shifting from *access* to *quality* has proven to be a difficult challenge for countries and international agencies alike.

Gender equity in education also remained centered around access -- the number of boys and girls that start primary school. Not enough attention has been paid to issues such as different expectations and treatment within schools, access to secondary education and higher education, and imbalances in vocational/technical training and employment. On the other hand, now that repetition and drop-out indicators have started to be analyzed separately by gender, discrimination toward male students has become apparent in several cases, revealing lower school performance rates and higher drop-out rates among boys, who are more pressed and exposed to paid child labor in many societies.

This underscores the need to view equity by gender in a much broader sense, not only from the standpoint of women.

Building schools and investing in infrastructure is still the principal strategy adopted in many countries not only to universalize primary education but also to "improve the quality of education". Despite a policy shift and the explicit recommendation of the World Bank to governments to reduce this component, several developing countries in the three regions have continued to invest heavily in infrastructure, often within the same projects funded by the Bank.[28]

Latin America is a good example of the separation between quantity and quality, of how access can be increased in step with an increase in repetition and drop-out rates and low levels of learning in schools. Within the scope of EFA, Latin America was considered the region that was close to achieving basic education for all. On the basis of a set of quantitative indicators — massive school enrollments, equal numbers of boys and girls enrolled, and relatively low official rates of adult illiteracy (approximately 15%) — Latin America

27. *"The expanded vision of basic education espoused in Jomtien has often been reduced to a simple emphasis upon putting more children into school: an essential step, but only one of many measures needed to achieve EFA."* (Amman Affirmation, 1996)

28. Subsequent to a public self-criticism for having placed too much priority on infrastructure funding in past attempts at educational reform in developing countries (Verspoor, 1991), in the mid-1990s the World Bank attempted to dissuade countries to invest in building schools: *"School buildings [...] are not entirely necessary to obtain desired academic outcomes. Indeed, the first 'academe' in Europe was a public grove of trees where Plato taught; even today, learning occurs in the absence of buildings in many countries, including parts of rural India"* (World Bank, 1995:33).

tends to be perceived by the international community as a region that has virtually solved the problem of access to schooling, and even the problem of schooling itself. This perception has been facilitated by the traditional association of *universalization of primary school* and *universalization of access to primary school,* and the illusions and distortions often created by figures and averages.

4. From *basic* learning needs to *minimum* learning needs

> *"The satisfaction of these [basic learning] needs empowers individuals in any society and confers upon them a responsibility to respect and build upon their collective cultural, linguistic and spiritual heritage, to promote the education of others, to further the cause of social justice, to achieve environmental protection, to be tolerant towards social, political and religious systems which differ from their own, ensuring that commonly accepted humanistic values and human rights are upheld, and to work for international peace and solidarity in an interdependent world."* (Article 1, Meeting Basic Learning Needs)

Education for All implies a broad definition of "basic learning needs", encompassing knowledge, skills and values required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning.

However, *basic* tends to be interpreted as *minimum.*[29] "*Basic* learning needs" are understood by many as a set of survival skills, satisfying the immediate, instrumental and most elementary needs of individuals. Furthermore, given the usual association *learning = children, basic learning needs* soon came to be identified with children, schooling and school curricula, and reinterpreted as "minimum content" or "minimum standards", a learning kit comprising a set of *life* or *survival skills* that includes very different categories of "skills" (reading, writing, and numeracy, notions of hygiene and health, AIDS prevention, conflict resolution techniques, development of self-esteem, etc.).[30]

29. The Amman Affirmation (1996) stated that: *"The World Declaration on Education for All was intended to empower, not to limit — to propose minimums, but not to set ceilings."*

30. Indeed, this is the essence of initiatives led, or highlighted, by international organizations in the field of school assessment in Asia and Africa, such as the Assessment of Basic Competencies (ABC) project in Bangladesh (it assesses the ability of children aged 11 and 12 to *"read and understand a passage of text, write a letter communicating a simple message, solve mental arithmetic problems and demonstrate life skills"*); the Minimum Level of Achievement Evaluation Project in India; or the UNICEF-UNESCO International Project on Monitoring Learning Achievement launched in 1992 in 5 countries and currently implemented in 27 countries in Africa and Asia to help them meet minimum basic learning skills for Grade 4 students (UNICEF, 1999a: 22-25; Chinapah, 1997).

The minimalist notion of learning coincides with, and is often part of, a largely misinterpreted concern for the "relevance" of the curriculum, whereby "relevance" means knowledge linked to the local environment, something that can be immediately used in daily life and directly observed and tested in practice. In line with this restricted idea of "relevance", children from rural populations should learn only what their rural environment demands of them, and girls' education should focus on the requirements of their future as mothers and housewives. Access to higher forms of thinking, reading for pleasure, art and new technologies, tends not to be considered part of the basic learning needs and the provision of basic education to poor urban and rural children.

The notion of *literacy* defined in some of the original Jomtien documents as *"a uniquely effective tool for learning, for accessing and processing information, for creating new knowledge, and for participating in one's own culture and the emerging world culture"* (Inter-Agency Commission for the World Conference on EFA, 1990: 63) is not dominant in school classrooms, or in youth and adult literacy programs, in developing countries. This definition may appear in the official curriculum, but not necessarily in the daily interaction between educators and learners. Among international, government and non-governmental organizations, the notion of child and adult *literacy* is still restricted to minimums, to quantity and quality standards that would be unacceptable and inconceivable in the industrialized world.[31] In fact, the widespread distinction between "literacy" and "*functional* literacy" has helped institutionalize the possibility of calling "literacy" the mere mechanical deciphering of the written language, without meaningfully understanding it and using it in daily life. Minor changes tend to be considered innovations in the (child and adult) literacy field, a field in need of a major theoretical and practical renovation effort.

The notions of *needs* and *learning* are generally associated to students, to those who are in school, to those who demand education. EFA recommends "identifying" the basic learning needs of children, youth and adults, through research, participation and social dialogue.[32]

However, adopting basic learning needs as a guiding principle of the curriculum means not only "identifying", but helping develop, such needs. This

31. The International Adult Literacy Survey conducted in several OECD countries (Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States) defined literacy as the capacity to use *"printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential"* (OECD, 1995, 1997)

32. The EFA Framework for Action stipulates: *"The first step consists in identifying, preferably through an active participatory process involving groups and the community, the traditional learning systems which exist in the society, and the actual demand for basic education services, whether expressed in terms of formal schooling or non-formal education programmes."* (Principles of Action, Number 10)

implies informing and qualifying educational demand, particularly among the poor and socially excluded, in order to expand the horizon of perceived "basic learning needs" and avoid greater inequity and exclusion in meeting such needs. It also implies identifying and defining the role of the different learning environments and sectors — the family, the community, schools, communication media, the state, NGOs, etc. — in meeting basic learning needs, so as to outline a system of responsibilities and coordination at the local, regional and national levels.

This approach did not become a reality, or even an educational trend, in the 1990s. Education reform processes have continued to focus on the *supply* side of education (essentially school education) with little attention to educational *demand* (students, parents, families, social groups, society at large). There are few cases of curriculum reforms formulated on the basis of initiatives aimed at identifying the situation, and building on the educational expectations of, specific social groups, at the local or national level. Efforts to inform, educate and "qualify educational demand" remain scarce, and are generally led by NGOs and local action groups. In short, basic learning needs have not yet become a subject of research and analysis, or of policy design, particularly for curriculum and pedagogical reform.

The very concept of "basic learning needs" has remained vague and has not been significantly developed in theory or practice. It still needs to be elaborated beyond the concise, schematic definition provided in the EFA Declaration.[33] *Literacy* — both child and adult, inside and outside the school system — is a field that has remained on the sidelines, even conceptually. As we have seen, EFA documents mix reading and writing with all types of "life skills". At the same time, references are still made to "literacy *and* basic education", showing that *literacy* is still not included in the concept of *basic education,* that *literacy* remains associated only with adults and non-formal education, and that *basic education* remains linked to schooling and children.

33. The Jomtien Declaration classifies basic learning needs in two groups: *"essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning."* In another paper (Torres, 1993), I critically analyzed this way of conceptualizing and categorizing basic learning needs, particularly: (a) the categorization of reading and writing as "essential learning tools", which suggests a traditional vision of both as mere techniques and skills; (b) verbal language and mathematics cannot be considered "tools" as they both have formative value and are pertinent in themselves; (c) reading, writing and oral expression are part of a whole — language — and should be understood as linguistic competencies; (d) it is not only a question of "problem solving", but rather of developing basic cognitive learning competencies ("problem solving" being one of them). These cognitive competencies cover both "tools" (i.e. teaching how to write more effectively means teaching how to think more effectively; learning how to solve math problems means acquiring a better capacity to solve other types of problems, etc.) and "content"; and (e) values and attitudes belong to both groups, not only to "content".

The instrumental vision of learning, governed by minimums rather than essentials, extends to the field of teacher education and training. The basic learning needs of teachers in order to take up the "new role" expected of them, address the basic learning needs of their students and implement the new curriculum reforms (supposedly guided by such needs), have barely been touched upon. Or have been responded also with a limited "teacher survival" kit: information, knowledge, techniques and skills to help implement the education reform in progress.

The education reform package recommended and funded by international loans to developing countries includes widespread in-service teacher training programs, within an overall scheme that aims at reducing the duration and scope of teacher preparation.

Such teacher training programs are generally focused on instrumental knowledge and skills (mastering a repertoire of methods and techniques, using manuals and textbooks, following the education reform guidelines, etc.), rather than conceived in terms of the comprehensive, lifelong education and learning needed by the teaching profession to address the new, increasingly complex task demanded of them by educational reformers themselves. The boom experienced by school textbooks in the 1990s, driven by sizable investments in this area in most developing countries, is part of a strategy to alleviate the burden and cut the cost of teacher training and salaries, inasmuch as school textbooks are considered repositories of the curriculum and pedagogy (Torres, 1996 a,b,d; Coraggio & Torres, 1997).

5. From focusing on *learning* to improving (and assessing) the *school performance* of students

> *"Whether or not expanded educational opportunities will translate into meaningful development - for an individual or for society - depends ultimately on whether people actually learn as a result of those opportunities, i.e., whether they incorporate useful knowledge, reasoning ability, skills, and values. The focus of basic education must, therefore, be on actual learning acquisition and outcome, rather than exclusively upon enrollment, continued participation in organized programs and completion of certification requirements. Active and participatory approaches are particularly valuable in assuring learning acquisition and allowing learners to reach their fullest potential. It is, therefore, necessary to define acceptable levels of learning acquisition for educational programs and to improve and apply systems of assessing learning achievement."* (Article 4, Focusing on Learning)

Focusing on learning was a key element of the Jomtien vision. Adopting *learning* as a guiding principle and the ultimate aim of education implies

reversing conventional priorities, focusing on learners, substantially rethinking content, pedagogy, evaluation systems and school organization and management models, providing quality teaching and teacher education and training, and laying down the conditions needed to ensure all this. Evidently, this goal requires sustained, systematic efforts in the medium and long term, beyond a single decade or even a generation.

"Learning" has been widely adopted in modern education parlance, but remains largely sidestepped in post-Jomtien policies and reforms. The complex mandate of "focusing on learning" has been translated as "improving learning" and implemented through a series of discreet measures (increased instruction time, provision of school textbooks, in-service teacher training, school feeding programs, compensatory strategies for the poor and disadvantaged, etc.) that often contradict with other measures (increased class size, multiple shifts, freezing teacher salaries, etc.) that undermine and even cancel out the positive impact that the other measures might have. As was the case with previous attempts at education reform, reforms in the 90s were conceived as top-down interventions that do not compromise the *school system,* much less the *education system* as a whole, and that typically promote superficial modifications and short-lived innovations. Strategies and measures were devised in the light of budgets and cost-benefit ratios, rather than quality and learning (Coraggio & Torres, 1997).

Focusing on learning means placing priority on *demand* and *learning,* breaking away from the long centered *supply*- and *teaching*-centered educational tradition, and reorienting conventional school and education paradigms.

However, *learning* in schools tends to be reduced to school *performance* and the use of standard tests has become widespread. By preserving the traditional education mentality that associates *learning* = *children* and *teaching* = *teachers,* the "focus on learning" remains reserved to children/students, without acknowledging teacher learning as an essential pre-requisite to ensure student learning and the very possibility to develop and transform education and school systems. Teacher training cannot be viewed simply as an annex to education reform. Despite the fact that EFA recognized the critical role of teachers, their professional status -- in terms of training, as well as their quality of life, work conditions and teaching and learning environment -- has once again been overlooked in education reform processes in the 1990s.

In the context of the traditional lack of distinction between *education* and *teaching,* and between *teaching* and *learning,* "improving education" is equated with "improving teaching", and "improving teaching" with "improving learning". Teachers tend to be given the main (if not only) responsibility for

both "deteriorating" and "improving" quality, without taking stock of all other factors inherent to education (and its quality) that are not related to teachers and teaching.

Based on the idea that improved teaching automatically leads to improved learning, teachers and teacher training programs are required to have a direct impact on student learning achievement. This is currently the basis for widespread teacher evaluation, remuneration and incentive policies and measures linked to student performance. This "logic", resisted by teachers and teacher organizations in many parts of the world, disregards the complex relationship between education, teaching and learning, and the complexities of learning, a field that remains largely under-developed and misunderstood.

The quantity/quality distinction in education often goes hand-in-hand with the sequence administrative reform/pedagogical reform and content/methods. Education reforms implemented in the 1990s emphasized administrative issues, taking decentralization (of the school system, teacher training, production of instructional materials, etc.) as the key entry point for educational change. Once again, improving learning tended to focus on *content* (curriculum reforms, provision of textbooks, etc.), while *pedagogy* — the cornerstone of any attempt to improve learning — has been sidetracked or postponed.

Focusing on *learning* focuses on *results* rather than on *processes.* Measuring these results, in terms of school performance, became a priority in the past few years. Latin America and the Caribbean is a clear example of this trend: by the end of the decade most countries had organized national or subnational assessment systems, whereas at the beginning of the decade, only four countries — Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico and Colombia — had such systems in place. At the same time, there are few cases of the results of these evaluations being used to (re)draft policies and measures designed to effectively improve teaching and learning (Wolff, 1998). Essentially, it is expected that measuring and publicizing results, and comparing schools on the basis of these results, will improve school performance.

The educational paradigm, and more specifically the pedagogical paradigm, remain largely unaltered, despite decentralization and other measures implemented in recent years. School performance appraisals conducted in different countries do not show a clear pattern as to whether better and more effective learning is being been achieved in schools. In Latin America, national, subnational and/or international assessments involving different countries have generally shown poor school performance, with much lower scores than projected minimums. This has led some governments to block the release of such figures.[34] Examples include a pilot test carried out by UNESCO-OREALC

in 1993 among Grade 4 students in seven countries, and language and mathematics tests conducted in 1997 among Grade 3 and Grade 4 students in public and private schools in 15 countries. The latter study shows that Cuba's student performance is these areas is much better than that achieved by other countries in the region.[35] The fact that Cuba — an isolated country, undergoing a heavy economic crisis, where there is no private school system — posted significantly better results than countries that have embarked upon "modern" educational reforms, making use of international loans, provides food for thought and shakes the foundations on which reforms and policies to "improve the quality of education" stand in Latin America and other developing regions.

If major changes are not introduced in the theory and practice of school education and teaching, it will be impossible to improve learning results within schools. Automatic promotion and similar measures to reduce repetition and dropout rates are short-term, stop-gap measures, unable to bring about progressive, long-term changes to effectively deal with learning.

6. From ***expanding the vision*** of basic education to ***increasing the duration*** (number of years) of compulsory schooling

Expanding the vision of basic education was generally understood as increasing the number of years of compulsory schooling, rather than broadening the scope of basic education.

In the 1990s, most countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean increased the duration of compulsory schooling to 8, 9, 10, 11 or more years, adding years in the lower levels (initial and pre-school education) and/or in the upper levels (lower secondary education). The term *basic education* is now used in many countries to refer to schooling that lasts 9 or 10 years, coinciding with the notion of "extended primary education", although in some cases it includes one or two years of pre-school education or of what was previously part of secondary education. As a result, the term *basic education* has become increasingly vague, difficult to understand and difficult to compare internationally. Within the scope of current trends to extend and

34. See Wolff, 1998; UNESCO-OREALC, 1998.

35. UNESCO-OREALC, 1998. The 15 countries that participated in the study were Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela.

reorganize school cycles and levels, other terms — such as *initial education, early childhood education, pre-school education, primary school, post-primary education, secondary school, middle school* — have been redefined inside each country, making it difficult to compare systems and exchange information at the international level. Extended compulsory education, however, is far from a reality in most developing countries.[36]

The same international EFA partners continued to use the term *basic education* in very different ways. The World Bank understood *basic education* as "*non-formal education* of youth and adults" (World Bank, 1988), then as *primary education*, and finally incorporated lower secondary education in its definition of *basic education.*[37] UNICEF emphasized early childhood development/initial education and primary education within *basic education,* and defended the need to consider *initial* education the period covering the 0-8 age group (UNICEF, 1993b, 1995a). UNESCO adopted the term *basic education* as defined in Jomtien, but has continued to use conventional indicators categorized under *pre-school, primary, secondary* and *higher* education in its World Education Reports, with a separate indicator for *adult literacy.* The Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century calls *basic education* a stage which "includes, in particular, pre-primary and primary schooling" (Delors, 1996:129). In fact, a consensus has not been reached on the term, and categories and indicators have not been developed to make *basic education* a working concept capable of being measured and assessed.[38]

Increasing the number of years of study is part of a trend whereby the increase in *time* spent in school is considered a key variable to improving learning. In addition to prolonging compulsory schooling, extending the school year and increasing the number of hours of study inside and outside school (homework considered an extension of the school day) have been promoted. The number of hours and days of instruction has become a school

36. Here are some examples of the situation in Latin America. In Mexico, *basic education* currently comprises primary school and lower secondary school (nine years of compulsory schooling). In El Salvador, the 1990 Education Act extended compulsory schooling to 11 years, which includes initial education (4-6 age group) and nine years of so-called basic education. In Argentina, the 1993 Education Act extended compulsory schooling to 10 years, including one year of initial level (5-6 age group) and nine of *basic general education.* In Bolivia, the 1994 Education Act set nine years of compulsory basic education: one year of pre-school education and eight years of primary education. In Ecuador, compulsory education was extended to 10 years, including one year of pre-school education, six of primary school and three of (former) secondary school. Also, in some countries *basic cycle refers* to the first two grades of primary school; in other countries, *basic cycle refers* to the first two or three years of secondary school.

37. *"Basic education provides the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes to function effectively in society and is hence the priority every where [...] This basic level tipically involves about eight years of schooling".* (World Bank, 1995:63)

38. There are still problems with conventional education indicators that have not been resolved in recent years. See McMeekin, 1998 for the situation in Latin America.

system indicator and a school performance predictor in developing countries, with industrialized countries -- and the "Asian Tigers" in particular -- serving as a parameter in this area. However, as is the case with other variables analyzed in isolation, time does not directly or necessarily impact on school performance and learning, as shown in a study conducted in 1996-97 by UNESCO's International Bureau of Education (IBE)[39].

Thus, when a global commitment is made to quality *basic education,* and when implementation is monitored, it is difficult to know what goals are being affirmed and what is actually being measured.

7. From basic education as the ***foundation for lifelong learning*** to basic education as an ***end in itself***

> *"Basic education is more than an end in itself."* (Article 1, Meeting Basic Learning Needs)
>
> *"Sound basic education is fundamental to the strengthening of higher levels of education and of scientific and technological literacy and capacity and thus to self-reliant development."* (World Declaration on Education for All)
>
> *"Societies should also ensure a strong intellectual and scientific environment for basic education. This implies improving higher education and developing scientific research. Close contact with contemporary technological and scientific knowledge should be possible at every level of education."* (Article 8, Developing a Supportive Policy Context)

The 1990s will be remembered as the Decade of Basic Education, and more specifically, as the Decade of Primary Education. Primary education has occupied national and international education agendas, openly competing -- in terms of focus and resources -- with secondary and tertiary education.

The World Bank, currently the largest external funding agency and advisor on education in developing countries, recommended that governments implement a gradual strategy: only countries that had succeeded in adequately

39. The study was based on the national education development reports presented by countries at the 45th Session of the International Conference on Education (1996), which included a question about teaching hours in the primary cycle. The analysis (drawing on 67 public school systems) came, among others, to the following conclusions: the amount of time allocated to the lower grades (an average of 3,069 hours) is *greater* in least developed countries (3,166 hours in 37 school systems) than in developed countries (2,950 hours in 30 school systems); the number of hours allocated to Grade 1 is *greater* in least developed countries than in developed countries, as is the number allocated to Grade 4. In other words, the premise that more time of instruction = better school performance is unfounded. It must be pointed out, however, that the data collected by IBE, as well as the data previously gathered by the World Bank regarding time of instruction, are *official* figures, which do not necessarily reflect real teaching time. See IBE-UNESCO, 1997.

resolving basic education *(primary education)* should move to the following stage.[40] Within the scope of EFA, it recommended that governments reduce investment in tertiary education and transfer these resources to basic education. The lack of interest and resources has deepened the crisis in higher education (Altbach & McGill, 1999). Sidestepped during the first half of the 1990s, secondary education has started to emerge as the priority for the first decade of the new century.

Latin America expressed its concern, both at the Regional preparatory EFA Conference held in Quito in 1989 and at the Jomtien World Conference in 1990, to ensure that *basic* education be understood as a foundation, not a ceiling, and that priority devoted to basic education does not constitute a "downward trend" to the detriment of the higher education levels. This concern has proven justified.

School education reform has traditionally -- and once again -- adopted a segmented, gradual approach, based on pre-defined stages and levels, without viewing the *system* as a system, thus acknowledging the inter-connections between the various stages and levels. Indeed, the very goal of quality basic education for all implies good secondary and tertiary education capable of preparing qualified teachers, planners, researchers and other specialists required to make quality education a reality. On the other hand, a major overhaul of the school system, in which future teachers are trained, is a key element for teacher education reform.

Following an initial post-Jomtien period during which both international agencies and governments of developing countries focused on primary education and child education, emphasis was increasingly placed on secondary (adolescents and youth) education in the second half of the 1990s. Awareness has been growing of the "real problem" and the "real urgency" of the increasingly explosive situation of youth, deeply affected by a period of instability, crisis and change in all spheres, with the specter of unemployment and dim future prospects. Over the past few years, diagnoses, studies and assessments on secondary education in a number of industrialized and developing countries have started to build a new consensus, at the national, regional and global levels, around the priority and urgency of secondary education. Given

40. *"Basic education ought usually to be the priority for public spending on education in those countries that have yet to achieve near-universal enrolment at these levels."* (World Bank, 1995: xiii)

the tradition in school education reform, it is to be expected that this new priority may mean neglecting other educational levels, including primary education, with higher education waiting for its "own" decade sometime in the XXI century.

8. From enhancing the ***learning environment*** to enhancing the ***school environment***

> *"Learning does not take place in isolation. Societies, therefore, must ensure that all learners receive the nutrition, health care, and general physical and emotional support they need in order to participate actively in and benefit from their education."* (Article 6, Enhancing the Environment for Learning)

> *"To achieve the targets set for itself, each country is encouraged to develop or update comprehensive and long-term plans of action (from local to national levels) to meet the learning needs it has defined as "basic". Within the context of existing education-sector and general development plans and strategies, a plan of action for basic education for all will necessarily be multisectoral, to guide activities in the sectors involved (e.g. education, information, communications/media, labor, agriculture, health)."* (Framework for Action, Assessing Needs and Planning Action)

Breaking away from the sectoral vision of education was laid down as a condition to achieve EFA, as outlined in the World Declaration and the Framework for Action. However, the sectoral approach is still dominant among international organizations, governments and NGOs.

Educational policies, strategies and programs continue to be devised from the educational and even intra-school perspective. The call made at Jomtien to convert education into an issue for *states,* not only for governments, and to view it not only as the responsibility of Ministries of Education but as a shared, co-ordinated responsibility for different ministries, has been integrated in educational discourse, not necessarily in reform formulation and implementation. Multisectoral strategies are preferred and described in documents; in practice, the sectoral approach tends to take precedence.

Even an organization like UNICEF, committed to the development and well-being of children, and with programmatic conditions that would facilitate coordination of programs in different sectors — health, nutrition, education, water and sanitation, environment, etc. — to guarantee the rights of children, has encountered tremendous difficulties to overcome sectoral barriers in devising multisectoral policies and programs at headquarters, regional and national levels.

"Enhancing the environment for learning" tends to be considered a task

for the education sector only, and has basically been translated into the provision of elements deemed critical to enhance the quality of education in schools — facilities, textbooks, school and classroom libraries, computers, in-service teacher training, etc. Strategies to enhance the "educability" of pupils in poor social sectors include measures that primarily aim to alleviate poverty within schools, such as school feeding programs or a small subsidy to families (grants, scholarships, etc.).

This is a far cry from multisectoral policies capable of dealing with structural problems — poverty, malnutrition, unemployment, lack of access to relevant information, etc.— that directly impact the learning conditions of learners, low-income sectors and society at large. In fact, the 1990s saw an increase in economic and social inequity the world over, widening the gap between the rich and the poor, at a time when educational policy has promoted "cost-sharing" and enhanced "family and community participation" to ensure, among others, household financial contribution to education.

Priority on basic education has been justified by the World Bank in terms of achieving sustainable development and alleviating poverty. However, poverty is on the increase around the world, making *quality basic education for all* an increasingly complex and remote goal. Urgent socio-economic problems of families are pressuring schools to take up a role that is increasingly removing them from their central function, i.e. teaching and learning. Compensatory programs and policies have multiplied in an attempt to "focus on poverty" and to help "alleviate poverty". The assumption that school is a place of social containment and a solution to poverty-driven problems, rather than a place of systematic learning, is becoming more and more widespread.

9. From ***all*** countries to ***developing countries***

"These problems [mounting debt burdens, the threat of economic stagnation and decline, rapid population growth, widening economic disparities among and within nations, war, occupation, civil strife, violent crime, the preventable deaths of millions of children and widespread environmental degradation] have led to major setbacks in basic education in the 1980s in many of the least developed countries. In some other countries, economic growth has been available to finance education expansion, but even so, many millions remain in poverty and unschooled or illiterate. In certain industrialized countries too, cutbacks in government expenditure over the 1980s have led to the deterioration of education." (Preamble, World Declaration on Education for All)

"Meeting basic learning needs constitutes a common and universal human responsibility. It requires international solidarity and equitable and fair economic relations in

order to redress existing economic disparities. All nations have valuable knowledge and experiences to share for designing effective educational policies and programs." (Article 10, Strengthening International Solidarity).

It was emphasized at Jomtien and subsequent conferences that EFA must not only be interpreted as a plan of action for developing countries (the Third World, the South), but also for developed countries (the First World, the North). However, one of the constant complaints of the EFA co-ordinators has been the industrialized world's lack of involvement.

Education for All was devised as a global movement of "positive discrimination" in two senses: focus on *basic education* and focus on *developing countries.* The emphasis placed on developing countries undoubtedly contributed to the minimalist interpretation of Education for All and the concept of *basic education* (i.e. education = schooling, basic education = primary education, universalization = access, basic learning = minimum learning). In any case, EFA was perceived globally as a proposal for action aimed specifically at the Third World, and thus as a proposal containing no new or relevant ideas for the First World.

As is the case for many other areas, education reform in the North and the South have long been guided by asymmetric parameters: policies and measures proposed and implemented in the South have often been implemented (and even discarded) several years or decades earlier in the North; moreover, international recommendations promoted in the South as sound and founded educational policies, would often be unacceptable and considered a step backwards in the North. This is the case with measures such as increasing class size, introducing multiple shifts in schools or hiring unqualified teachers - all of which have been recommended to developing countries in recent years not only to cut costs, but to improve the quality of primary education (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991; World Bank, 1995).

The EFA World Declaration and the Framework for Action addressed industrialized countries from at least two standpoints: as *problem* countries — also facing a serious educational crisis that is similar, in many respects, to that experienced by developing countries (unmet basic learning needs of the population, illiteracy, drop-out and repetition, poor school achievement, irrelevant curricula, dissatisfaction and poor preparation of teachers, budget cuts) — and as countries holding part of the *solution* to problems faced by developing countries, by proactively contributing to build a more equitable and fair world order to close — rather than widen — the gap between rich and poor countries.

10. From the responsibility of *countries and the international community* to the responsibility of *countries*

> *"Substantial and long-term increases in resources for basic education will be needed. The world community, including intergovernmental agencies and institutions, has an urgent responsibility to alleviate the constraints that prevent some countries from achieving the goal of education for all. It will mean the adoption of measures that augment the national budgets of the poorest countries or serve to relieve heavy debt burdens. Creditors and debtors must seek innovative and equitable formulae to resolve these burdens, since the capacity of many developing countries to respond effectively to education and other basic needs will be greatly helped by finding solutions to the debt problem."* (Article 10, Strengthening International Solidarity)

Any analysis of EFA would be incomplete if it did not include an assessment and a self-assessment of the role of the sponsor agencies that organized, coordinated and followed-up this initiative.[41] However, the dominant post-Jomtien trend has been to assess processes and results exclusively in the light of countries. As stated, the list of core indicators drawn up by the EFA Forum and sent to countries to establish an end-of-decade assessment does not include any indicators on international cooperation. Moreover, the timetable for the EFA 2000 Assessment did not include the agency and inter-agency assessment process.

In the assessment scheme defined within the scope of EFA (a) assessment is applied to *implementation* (and not also to planning, design, monitoring, evaluation, information and communication strategies at the global, regional and national levels) and (b) implementation is placed under the realm of individual countries (and not also of cooperation agencies). However, EFA was originally defined as a major world alliance of countries -- governments and civil societies -- and international agencies. Here, countries and agencies are jointly responsible for design, execution, processes and results.

There are no explicit references in the Jomtien documents to the role of international agencies, and, in particular, to the four sponsors, in the development and achievement of EFA. In any case, references were made to international cooperation in terms of the provision of resources and mediation

41. In addition to the four main EFA sponsors (UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank), other organisations sponsored the World Conference and EFA:

Co-Sponsors: Asian Development Bank, Denmark, Finland, Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO), Japan, Norway, Sweden, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Associate Sponsors: Australia, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Italy, Switzerland, Bernard van Leer Foundation and World Health Organisation (WHO).

actions to obtain additional resources, not to their technical and leadership role.[42]

With somewhat differing views and positions, the four international agencies that sponsored EFA played a proactive part in every stage of the program: conceptualizing and building consensus, circulating information,organizing the preparatory regional conferences, the world conference and the subsequent assessment meetings, coordinating, monitoring and assessing actions, compiling and processing statistics, identifying problem areas and conducting studies, preparing support material, and promoting intra- and inter-regional co-ordination. Countries were guided and reminded of EFA commitments and goals. They were constantly encouraged to forge ahead, often testing the will and capacities of governments and societies.

International agencies committed to significantly increase their education budgets, within timeframes they set themselves, and to create the internal conditions needed to facilitate the work of countries in achieving the goals. Strengthening international solidarity was a condition for the viability of EFA and defined as such in the Jomtien documents. However, inter-agency coordination efforts were in many senses more formal than real (Ahmed, 1997; Habte, 1997) and insufficient to address the challenge of leading a global initiative, as well as to maintain the levels and quality of inter-ministerial and intra-national co-ordination that agencies, in turn, requested of countries. The lack of co-ordination among agencies was brought up at all the high-level seminars organized by UNICEF and IIEP-UNESCO between 1993 and 1995 in Africa, Asia and the Middle East to evaluate the progress of EFA, and at the regional and subregional mid-decade assessment meetings.

Problems relating to co-ordination among the four EFA partners — some of which were long-standing, others arose from the global alliance which was new to all of them — obviously affected the development and results of EFA. In fact, each agency ended up largely promoting its own agenda, developing its own indicators and post-Jomtien monitoring tools.

During the first five years, UNICEF developed categories and targets to assess EFA progress in accordance with the goals of the World Summit for Children (also held in 1990) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

42. Even a creditor such as the World Bank underscores its core technical role, stating that *"internationally the Bank is the largest single source of policy advice and external funds for education"* (World Bank, 1992: 6) and that *"even though Bank funding now accounts for about a quarter of all aid to education, its effort still represents only about one half of one percent of developing countries' total spending on education. Thus, the World Bank's main contribution must be advice designed to help governments develop education policies suitable for the circumstances of their own countries"* (World Bank, 1995: xxiii).

these goals became part of the National Plans of Action that UNICEF promoted at the country level worldwide. The World Bank continued to support and increase funding for primary education, through the "Projects to Improve the Quality of Education" established in most developing countries, generally through *ad hoc* executory units external to Ministries of Education. UNESCO and UNICEF were the most active agencies in following up EFA. UNESCO played a central role in the coordination of the EFA Forum from Paris, compiling and analyzing statistical data, and drafting the World Education Reports as of 1991.

IV. Renewed validity of Education for All

"It would be advisable, as of now, to plan for a review in the year 2000 to evaluate what will have been accomplished, to measure the distance covered and to identify new goals to be achieved in the development of education. Once the objectives are defined, the most comprehensive general indicator for evaluating the extent to which the defined objectives have been attained and for determining how much still remains to be done would certainly be the literacy rate reached at the end of the decade. A task of considerable scope and significance would be to collect data that are as accurate, reliable and comparable as possible. Operational definitions of literacy and illiteracy would have to be established, so as to enable competence in handling the written word to be assessed, and a methodology proposed for the collection and processing of data. A report, based on the results of national censuses conducted around the year 2000, would be prepared on the state of literacy and illiteracy in the world." (Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO, 1990: 448)

"The goals of Jomtien have proved their worth. Let us build on the achievements of the last six years and accelerate them, over the next five and over the next fifteen. For that is what it will take." (Richard Jolly, Special Advisor to the Administrator of UNDP, Concluding Statement, Mid-Decade Meeting of the EFA Forum, Amman, June 1996)

"EFA was not designed as a grass-roots program. It is designed to be adaptable to different country and local situations. It was thought that since the world was not paying enough attention to basic education, it was time to remind the leaders of the world that this is an important area for development. Now, having done that, it is hoped that at the country level this transmits all the way down to the classroom. But that takes years and years. Jomtien was not a teachers' conference; it was a conference of ministers and governments. It is thus unfair to measure the success of Jomtien by the numbers of teachers who are aware of it. That was not the original goal. The original goal was for governments to move. But between one end and the other there is a long way to go. In fact 5, 10 years, may not be enough to measure the downward process."

(Victor Ordóñez, former Head of the Basic Education Division at UNESCO, 1997:13-14.)

The lag between the commitment and the achievements of Education for All at the end of the decade is manifest and will thus require a new postponement of the horizon. However, as underscored in this paper, the lag

refers not only to the goals set but *also* to the spirit of the proposal. In fact, EFA goals go hand-in-hand with the guiding principles and strategies defined to attain them. Implementing EFA within the framework of an "expanded vision of basic education" implies introducing complex and sustained change in various inter-related fields -- educational, cultural, political, economic and social. Such transformation processes require not only a firm political will and financial resources, but also imagination, long-term vision, a policy of alliances, adequate strategies, and timetables that far exceed a single decade.

Why the gap? Some people argue — as has been the case with prior international commitments to education that were not met and were postponed — that the problem lies in the initial diagnosis and in overly ambitious and unrealistic goals and targets at both the national and international levels.[43] Others claim, as on previous occasions, that it would not have been possible to anticipate the new contexts and the accelerated, dramatic changes that marked the 1990s and altered the face of the world. Others question the validity and pertinence of the proposal, along with its strategies and mechanisms, and its universal ambitions. Others would attribute part of the problem to the fact that the proposal was "misunderstood" by national and international bureaucracies.[44] Some people will blame countries and governments, while others will blame international organizations. Arguments already put forward include financial setbacks, structural adjustment processes, foreign debt, natural and social catastrophes, technical and human constraints, change of governments and discontinuity of policies, co-ordination problems at all levels, weak public information and communication strategies, lack of participation and consultation, low levels of involvement and motivation of teachers and other change agents, false expectations regarding mass media and modern technologies.

In fact, Jomtien was organized in the light of an optimistic vision of the 1990s, and, more specifically, of the potential of new technologies to distribute information and basic learning content inside and outside schools. While the Preamble to the Declaration on Education for All reviewed some of the major problems facing the world in the late 1980s (economic crisis, social decline, environmental degradation, war), it also pointed out the emergence

43. Predictions made in the late 1980s already indicated that economic difficulties would worsen in Third World countries, particularly in Africa, in the 1990s (see, for example, Der Thiam, 1990:561).

44. Following the presentation of this paper in Lima to an audience primarily made up of teachers, several questions were raised as to why the expanded vision of basic education did not take off. Several participants speculated that "part of the problem could be attributed to the drafting of the documents", and that "maybe bureaucrats at the Ministry of Education did not fully understand the proposal".

of *"a new century, with all its promise and possibilities"* — progress toward peaceful détente and greater co-operation among nations, the recognition of essential rights and capacities of women, numerous useful scientific and cultural developments, and the potential of information and communication technologies:

> *"Today, the sheer quantity of information available in the world — much of it relevant to survival and basic well-being — is exponentially greater than that available only a few years ago, and the rate of its growth is accelerating. This includes information about obtaining more life-enhancing knowledge — or learning how to learn. A synergistic effect occurs when important information is coupled with another modern advance – our new capacity to communicate."*
>
> All of this led to the conclusion that
>
> *"the goal of basic education for all — for the first time in history — [is] an attainable goal"* (Preamble, World Declaration on Education for All).

There was no indication of timeframes. As reminded (Ordóñez, 1997), the year 2000 was not defined as a deadline for EFA at Jomtien. The World Declaration did not mention dates, while the Framework for Action set the year 2000 as the horizon for two of its six targets: primary education and adult literacy. However, Jomtien documents are ambiguous and contradictory in this regard. Even the executive heads of the four agencies back in 1990 — F. Mayor (Director-General, UNESCO), J. Grant (Executive Director, UNICEF), W.H. Draper (Administrator, UNDP) and B. Conable (President, World Bank) — referred to the year 2000 in their speeches and declarations at Jomtien. In any case, EFA was primarily understood and adopted as a decade-long program. The end-of-decade assessment took on the aspect of a *final* assessment.

From the outset, many people thought that a single decade was not long enough to attain EFA goals, in particular, the universalization of primary education. Indeed, cost estimates for this EFA goal covered the 1990-2005 period (Colclough & Lewin, 1993). The truth is that both targets set for the year 2000 — universalization (access and completion) of primary education, and reduction of the adult illiteracy rate to one-half its 1990 level — and the gender disparity vis-à-vis both indicators, have not been achieved in Africa or Asia, neither in Latin America and the Caribbean, a region that is renowned for its comparative

advantages in these two areas.[45]

The beginning of a new decade, a new century and a new millennium, conjures up images of new beginnings, a tradition dear to the education field. Acting in this manner would be irresponsible and erroneous. It is time to critically analyze the situation, and to re-reorient and deepen efforts undertaken, because EFA goals have not been met, the EFA program is still relevant and valid, and its implementation require systematic, long-term actions. The lessons learned over the past decade must serve to (re)define future stages and strategies.[46]

It would be as erroneous to turn the page of the new century and move on to something else as it would be to simply continue doing more of the same — a "Jomtien II" or "*Education for All* Part Two" — assuming that it is merely a matter of more time and/or more money (new loans, new funding sources, more private sector funding, donations and voluntary schemes, new international committees and mechanisms to obtain and manage funds, etc.).

This is a time for reflection and analysis, rather than activism. A time to raise doubts and questions, rather than to reassure certainties, rapid diagnoses, ready-made answers and recipes on what has to be done. If it was not possible in the 1980s to anticipate the events of the 1990s, there is no reason to believe that at the end of the 1990s — an era of spectacular changes and uncertainty — we will be able to clearly predict the next decade, let alone the next century.

Reflecting and analyzing progress is key to advancing, and priorities and strategies must be redefined or reaffirmed accordingly. This should be the main focus of the 2000 EFA Assessment exercise both within countries and international organizations.

45. Latin America is illustrative of the continual postponement of education goals and deadlines through various initiatives that have been launched over the past decades (Torres, 1999b). At the end of the 1950s, the "Major Project to Extend and Improve Primary Education in Latin America and the Caribbean" *(Proyecto Principal de Extensión y Mejora de la Educación Primaria en América Latina y el Caribe* — LAMP) was launched and co-ordinated by UNESCO. In 1981, the Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (*Proyecto Principal de Educación en América Latina y el Caribe* — PPE) was launched in Quito, also sponsored and co-ordinated by UNESCO; it set a year 2000 deadline to achieve universal access to primary school, eradicate adult illiteracy, and improve the quality and efficiency of education (UNESCO-OREALC, 1981). *Education for All* in 1990 -- and the World Summit for Children, also held in 1990 and convened by UNICEF -- essentially reaffirmed the regional goals of the Major Project. Four years later, the *Summit of the Americas* (Miami, 1994), convened by the US government, launched a new regional initiative for education reform, the *Universal Access to Education for the Year 2010 Plan,* setting goals for primary, secondary and tertiary education, and fixing a regional deadline of 2010 for 100% completion rates for primary school and 75% for secondary school.

46. These were the conclusions of a global seminar on education policies organized by UNICEF in November 1998 to shape the vision of the twenty-first century: *"What was needed in global terms, it could be concluded, was less a new educational vision, than a better strategy for putting it into effect"* (UNICEF, 1999b:9)

Four topics need special review to face the future:

- initiative and leadership in education (the role of international agencies versus national States and local societies);
- the political, technical and financial viability of EFA and education reform;
- acknowledging diversity and the need for context-specific and culture-sensitive responses;
- the purpose and direction of educational change.

1. Initiative and leadership in education

The role of international agencies, national States and local societies

"There was general agreement that the government must take control of external aid and guide donor support rather than allowing donors to control the process. The preparation of a master plan for education development, which defines the role of different aid agencies, could be a means of ensuring donor co-ordination. But this is not an easy task as it pre-supposes a strong national government with a clear vision for the future and solid national capacities to develop realistic programs and action plans. Unfortunately, the countries where external aid is most needed are the ones which experience the most serious constraints in articulating and asserting their positions convincingly." (De Grauwe & Bernard, Developments after Jomtien: EFA in the South-East and Pacific Region, Yangoon, Myanmar, March 1995)

"...the low achievement in Africa could only be reversed if Africans took responsibility and control of their own development, including the development of education. Externally imposed solutions had failed and would continue to fail. External funding agencies should assist African governments and institutions to achieve Education for All, rather than impose unsound conditionalities which hamper progress. It was felt that conditionalities that have been imposed on Africa were different and more restrictive than on other regions." (Chung, 1996b:5. Report of the subregional mid-decade assessment meetings on EFA, Yaounde & Johannesburg, 1996)

"As far as donor agencies are concerned, views were reserved. Despite the assurances given by the representatives of aid agencies present at the meeting, a certain amount of skepticism was noted. Although the amount of aid given in some cases was considerable, countries are facing serious difficulties in defining a plan of action and entering into a real partnership with aid agencies whose own actions are often uncoordinated. Certain activities appear to overlap, in which case the assistance provided

is not very effective. Furthermore, continuity is not always ensured and the Sahel countries fear that they might have to bear the consequences of international instability elsewhere and priorities accorded to other regions of the world. But there was unanimous agreement on the need, at the national level, to form a committee of donors and to establish an active partnership with aid and cooperation agencies." (Three years after Jomtien: basic education in the Sahel countries, IIEP Newsletter, Vol. XI, No. 3, Paris, IIEP-UNESCO, 1993:2. Report on the seminar organized by IIEP-UNESCO and UNICEF in Burkina Faso to assess EFA progress in the Sahel countries.)

An issue raised in many countries, particularly in Africa and Asia, was the leadership of the EFA program and, in general, of education policy and reform in developing countries.[47] Many viewed EFA as a donor-driven initiative and argued that this was partially responsible for the lukewarm reception and passive implementation of EFA in several countries. In fact, the issue of international initiative and leadership explains some of the major strengths and weaknesses of the EFA proposal. Other issues outlined later in this paper — viability, diversity, and the purpose/direction of educational change — are closely related to this key issue.

Global initiative, coordination and monitoring were of paramount importance to a global program. Also, few would doubt of the important role that external cooperation plays in the continuity of education policies and programs at the country level, beyond changes of government, particularly when international agreements and loans are at stake. The question is rather how and when this leadership and power is to be exerted, and what is the role of countries in defining, implementing and adapting education policy within the scope of each national society. Strong, centralized, global leadership can undermine the legitimacy and viability of the proposal, hindering the development of endogenous capacities, taking over issues that should be resolved internally, overlooking the particular circumstances of each context, and reproducing the situation whereby some lead, propose and monitor actions, and others implement and are evaluated. This situation, which characterizes the traditional relationship between Ministries of Education and teachers within each country, may be now replicated on a global scale in the relationship between international agencies and national governments.

47. Africa was probably the region that most notably underlined the issue of autonomy vis-à-vis external agencies. See, for example, Deblé & Carron, 1993; Wright & Govinda, 1993; Chung, 1996b; Angula, 1997; Habte, 1997.

The 1990s witnessed a contradictory trend in this regard. On the one hand, decentralization of national school systems, leading to greater autonomy of intermediary levels and schools. On the other hand, globalization and stronger centralization of education policy on a global scale, with an increased influence of external agencies, particularly banks, in defining national education policies.

The fact that international organizations are part of the *solution* and the *problem* in the education sector is increasingly manifest and widely recognized. Criticism of, and the proposal for, a new international cooperation model with developing countries have been part of education debates in recent years. Criticism of, and proposals for, the construction of a new scenario and new rules for such cooperation have emerged first and foremost from international organizations involved in EFA: UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP and the World Bank[48] (see Boxes 4 and 5). Also, criticism and alternative proposals have been gaining ground among the academic community and specialists from both developed and developing countries.[49]

48. See, for example, Ahmed, 1997; Bennett, 1993; Berstecher & Carr-Hill, 1990; Bousquet, 1990; Chung, 1996, 1997; Habte, 1997; Hallak 1990, 1996; Haddad, 1990; Heyneman, 1995; UNDP, 1993, 1994; Speth, 1994; UNICEF, 1997; Verspoor, 1991. See also the Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (Delors et al., 1996).

49. See, for example, Arnove, 1996; Bennel, 1996; Coraggio, 1994, 1995, 1998, 1999; Coraggio & Torres, 1997; Gantiva, 1999; Jones, 1992; King, 1991, 1992, 1997; King & Singh, 1991; Lauglo, 1996; McGinn, 1997; Morales Gómez, 1989, 1990; Puiggrós, 1996; Riddell, 1997; Samoff, 1996; Samoff & Assié-Lumumba, 1995; Soler Roca, 1997a,b; Torres, 1996a, c, e, 1999a,b; Warde, 1998; Zogaib, 1997.

Box 4

A ten-point plan for new international cooperation for development (a proposal from UNDP)
1. Convert external, macroeconomic forces — trade, debt servicing, direct foreign investment and capital flows and access to technology — into positive forces that favor human development and satisfy development objectives.
2. Reform development aid to ensure funds are invested in real needs: the poor, human development and priority human concerns and the regeneration of the resource base. Increase the general level of development aid and ensure that funding for peacekeeping efforts, humanitarian emergencies, refugees and transitional economies comes from new additional resources, rather than from development aid.
3. Build upward development initiatives, ensure appropriation and work with new groups excluded from the development process: NGOs, women, private enterprise, indigenous groups, informal sector and local communities.
4. Go beyond the North-South alliance and reciprocal responsibilities, including alliances to promote regional and global goals, and obtain resources to achieve such alliances.
5. Face global problems — the environment, population, illness and migration — by meeting local needs and ensuring access to technology and funding.
6. Complement development projects with dialogue on policies and policy reforms in both industrialized countries and developing countries.
7. Foster strong private enterprise and the use of market forces and mechanisms and achieve fair prices.
8. Recognize and promote progress in human rights, pluralism and democratization.
9. Foster demilitarization and arms export controls.
10. Through these measures, accord priority to the development of national capacities — at the level of governments and civil society — for sustainable human development.

Source:

J.G. Speth, Administrator of UNDP, *Building a New UNDP*, Presentation to the Executive Board of UNDP, New York, United Nations Secretariat, 17 February 1994.

Box 5

Ten commandments for international donor agencies
1. Make education and Human Resource Development (HRD) a top priority for international aid: Increased investment in education by donors is justified on all grounds. However, the absorptive capacity — performance in disbursement and execution of programs — of each country must be carefully assessed.
2. Adopt a global concept of HRD: Foreign aid must not cause imbalances in national education systems. Donor agencies must ensure that action responding to priority problems in certain educational sub-sectors and levels is consistent with parallel convergent initiatives at the other levels and in other sub-sectors.
3. Establish support to HRD within the framework of national development policies and firm mutual commitments: Genuine commitment to fixed objectives must be forthcoming from the receiving countries' authorities. National priorities and objectives must be clearly defined.
4. Widen the time horizon of international cooperation in education: Visible results cannot be obtained overnight. Donors must stretch contributions over longer periods of time.
5. Focus on long-term extension and improvement of the receiving country's institutional capacities: External aid must focus on institution development to develop or maintain countries' education systems. Training at all levels of education systems is a priority.
6. Ensure the financial sustainability of HRD programs: While each country's financial commitment is essential, donors must also make a sustained commitment. Educational innovation requires long periods of consolidation. Donors must cooperate in the search for strategies to achieve self-sustainable funding of national educational policies.
7. Support strategic areas of educational sector management: Such strategic areas for which countries might consider enlisting the support of agencies are: a) incentives (financial and non-financial); b) teacher support and guidance; c) improvement of assessment and examination structures; d) development, design and distribution of teaching materials; e) rehabilitation and full use of buildings and other facilities; f) development of secondary- and tertiary-level distance education and g) financial support for non-formal training.
8. Improve the administrative machinery of the countries concerned: Donors and aid-requiring countries must be careful to ensure that priority is given to the development and strengthening of the existing educational administration machinery and that a component for improving this machinery is included in education projects.
9. Support "South-South" and multi-level cooperation: Donors must support the development of cooperation among developing countries, which takes the place of hiring foreign experts.
10. Promote coordination and organizational integration in international cooperation: Many externally financed programs would have infinitely more consequential impact if support were integrated, crossed institutional barriers and operated not only at the national level but also at the regional level. Coordination of donors should be in the hands of the countries themselves.

Source:
J. Hallak, *Investing in the Future. Setting Educational Priorities in the Developing World,* Paris, UNESCO-IIEP, 1990.

2. Viability

Financial viability and beyond

> *"There is a consensus on the need to reexamine the viability [of the Jomtien commitments] and, in any case, reschedule the projected timetable. Participants reiterate the need for more realistic objectives [...] At the national level, participants agree that the 'global turning-point' of Jomtien has not been reached in all areas, since it is not an easy task to simultaneously deal with the multiple political, social and economic problems facing the world and meet the Jomtien objectives."* (Report of the regional seminar organized by UNICEF and IIEP-UNESCO in Africa in 1993 to review the "Policies for Developing Education for All in the Sahel Countries". Deblé & Carron, 1993: 67-68.)

The viability of EFA was an issue brought up repeatedly by countries, in particular poor countries. In the first two or three years following Jomtien, leaders and intellectuals, notably in Africa and Asia, evoked the impossibility of meeting the goals given the severe economic crisis and the multiple competing demands (Deblé & Carron, 1993; De Grauwe & Doran, 1995; Wright & Govindra, 1994). Latin America, (mis)understanding that the goals were largely quantitative and had already been achieved in most countries in the region, did not pay much attention to EFA, nor did it need this platform to underscore the key issue of the decade: *quality.*

For countries and international agencies alike, the viability of EFA was essentially interpreted as *financia*l viability. *Political* viability — will and frame of mind of governments, civil societies and local and national educational communities to make a commitment and act — and *technical* viability — availability of knowledge and human resources and competencies needed at all levels — took a backseat in issues surrounding viability.

(a) Political viability

EFA became a world crusade for basic education aimed at strengthening awareness and political will among the international community, national leaders and decision-makers, and at increasing budgets earmarked for basic education. It was understood that each country, mainly government and the NGO national network, would take up the challenge to spread EFA messages and spirit, and create the internal conditions, will and commitment to achieve EFA goals (Ordóñez, 1997).

In many ways, Jomtien attained its goal of sensitizing and mobilizing the international community and national political leaders. However, the second stage, within each country, was weak and generally lacked an information,

participation and awareness-building strategy. EFA did not reach teachers, many of whom were never aware of the proposal or heard of it vaguely. This is also true in many countries of education specialists and other intellectuals, including universities and NGOs working in the education field.

Educational rhetoric in the 1990s introduced *consultation, consensus, alliances, qualification of demand* and *accountability* as core elements of education reform. However, the reforms implemented this decade in developing countries essentially replicated the traditional vertical scheme where society, and teachers, parents and students in particular, are considered mere observers or implementers. Reformers tend to think in terms of teacher *training* and *recycling,* in the development of competencies and skills, but overlook the importance of motivation and the will to change, which is the primary condition for change.

"It is now widely acknowledged that participation by beneficiaries in the design and implementation of projects can often be an important determinant of project effectiveness" (Banco Mundial, 1994:34). This is fundamental and valid in the relationship between external agencies and governments in the international arena, as well as in the relationship between governments / Ministries / decision-makers / planners and civil society/educational community/educators in each country. The failure of education reform processes that do not take into account the active participation of teachers, parents and other key social sectors and agents is now widely recognized and documented.

The vertical, hierarchical culture in education policy and reform has traditionally been criticized in the relationship between government and civil society, and more specifically, between the Ministry of Education and teachers. However, such vertical culture extends beyond national borders, and may be found in the relationship between international agencies and national govemments and societies. Indeed, in today's globalized world, education systems are no longer strictly national; their logic and dynamics -- both towards preservation or towards transformation -- cannot be understood without taking into account the international community and the role of funding agencies. Traditional international cooperation models in relation to developing countries -- vertical, uniform, elitist, non-transparent -- often contradict international agencies' recommendations to governments, i.e. participatory, democratic and transparent decision-making and management models.

More participatory, democratic parameters for education policy globally and locally, are essential for the development of a genuine, endogenous political will, able to translate projects into actions.

(a) Technical viability

> *"One of the major problems of the 1970s and 1980s has been that many governments simply accepted external aid without indicating how it should be employed. This was due to weak capacity at the planning and operational levels. For example, textbooks were published but could not be distributed; classrooms were built but could not be maintained. It is clear then that in many countries there is a need to establish a highly elaborate national capacity for design and management of programmes and resources for schooling for all. External aid cannot be fully effective unless the countries concerned have the necessary capacities to identify critical needs, negotiate appropriate assistance and manage the resources thus acquired. The international donor community can play a supportive role in this effort in both the short and long term."* (Haddad, 1990: 530)

This "lesson learned" by the World Bank in three decades of work in the education sector in developing countries remains a major challenge for educational development and change in these countries, as well as for international donors. While greater attention was paid to human resources and training in the 1990s, most countries are far from constituting the "critical mass" needed for the design and management of quality education and for quality change. Efforts made in teacher training, in particular, fall short of the educational profiles required, and of the "new role", "professionalism" and "autonomy" attributed to and expected from teachers (Torres, 1996a, b, d).

Costs became the primary concern of agencies and governments. Diagnoses and viability studies focused on the extent to which goals and targets met financial resources, but little attention was paid to the availability of the human and technical resources required. However, often the major setback to educational policy design and implementation is not the lack of economic resources, but rather the lack of qualified personnel at all levels. As funding agencies are fully aware, it is often the case that available funds cannot be accessed or utilized in line with timetables set because of technical/administrative constraints.

Weak national counter-parties in charge of negotiating international loans and implementing projects and programs funded by these loans are common in many developing countries. In fact, there are important margins in the negotiation process that some countries are able to use and others are not (Coraggio & Torres, 1997). This reinforces the vicious circle of dependence and underdevelopment, since countries resorting to foreign aid and technical advice are generally the poor, thus undermining the possibilities to use, test and develop their own national technical capacities.[50]

50. A critical analysis of some factors related to the modern consulting industry in the education field, particularly in Asia and Africa, can be found in Arthur et al., 1996.

The high cost of external consultants in Africa æ often imposed by donors and accepted by countries as *"the price of financial assistance"* (UNDP, 1993) æ has been pointed out as alarming in one of UNDP's Human Development Reports.[51]

(a) Financial viability

The Jomtien documents did not mention costs, but reports prepared for and subsequent to the Conference included calculations based on different categories and hypotheses of action.[52] According to a number of initial estimates (Colclough & Lewin, 1990; Haddad, 1990), an extra US$6-10 billion was needed annually to achieve universal *access* to primary education around the world.[53] The burden of financing schooling for all until the year 2000 would fall predominantly on countries, with an estimated annual increase of 3% required in national education budgets (Grant, 1990:37). The total international support required to help countries meet the goal of universal schooling was estimated at between US$1,000 million and US$1,300 million a year, or an approximate total of US$12,000 million for the decade, i.e. 28% of the total amount required (Haddad, 1990).[54]

Funding, and the need for "pragmatic" measures to cut costs to finance EFA, was the topic of a special session co-ordinated by World Bank officials at the Second Meeting of the EFA Forum (New Delhi, 1994). A combination of measures was proposed to optimize existing resources and enhance the internal efficiency and effectiveness of the school system (decentralizing school governance; reducing drop-out and repetition rates; increasing class

51. *"Technical co-operation is an important way for developing countries to acquire skills, build up their capacity and pursue self-reliant development. About a quarter of all development assistance to Africa has been in this form æ more than $3 billion a year. But this technical co-operation is under attack for being expensive and outmoded æ serving the priorities of the donors rather than building up national capacity. Such programmes often rely heavily on expatriate personnel. A study of ten African countries showed that around 75% of the resources are spent on personnel æ as opposed to equipment and operating expenses. Relatively little use is made of national experts. In Mali in 1990, donors employed some 80 foreign doctors and medical personnel, even though 100 qualified Malian doctors were unemployed. Donors often impose experts on reluctant national governments who feel this to be the price of financial assistance."* (UNDP, 1993).

52.See Colclough & Lewin, 1990, 1993; Haddad, 1990; Lassibille & Navarro, 1992; UNESCO, 1994.

53. The varying estimates correspond to two options: (1) reducing class size, and (2) maintaining the same number of students per class. In the second option, the Arab States and sub-Saharan Africa would have to increase their budget for primary education by 58%; the first option implied an increase of 78% (and Africa would have to double the number of primary school teachers).

54. At Jomtien, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies undertook to increase aid to basic education in developing countries in the 1990s. The World Bank would increase its educational lending to an annual level of US$1,500 million; UNICEF would double its annual support to education from US$50 million in 1990 to US$100 million in 1995 and quadruple it to US$200 million by 2000; UNDP would double or triple its assistance to education (Haddad, 1990).

size; introducing multiple shifts; using new, more cost-effective educational technologies and widespread distance education; locally recruiting low-cost para-professionals trained through in-service training programs; applying economies of scale and promoting bigger schools) and to seek other financing sources (private enterprise, and parent and community increased involvement).

National educational reforms in the 1990s æ focused on basic education — were financed in part by loans with international banks.[55] Such loans became "naturalized" in developing countries, considered essential for expanding basic education, and the only financial margin to introduce reform and innovation in the school system. Also, there is widespread confusion between *international loans* and *international funding,* since in fact it is always *national* funding. Africa drew attention to the increased debt burdens and called on countries to seek ways of financing their own basic education without foreign loans.[56]

Laying the foundations for sustained and sustainable national educational policy implies making a commitment not only to efficiency (rational management of resources) but also to *ethics;* introducing social accountability and public information not only from schools to parents and society, but from policy-makers and all those who make decisions and manage public funds; building public awareness on education and qualifying educational demand so that citizens can demand information and accountability and pressure governments to comply with agreements, goals and education budgets;[57] and rethinking the current education and school model, looking for a model that is pertinent to the specific needs and context of each nation, financially and otherwise.

55. In Latin America, the World Bank heads the list of external funding agencies for the education sector, followed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Between 1990 and 1994, loans from the two banks amounted to approximately US$2 billion. It is estimated that loans from the WB since 1991 have represented on average between 1% and 2% of countries' annual expenditure on education (McMeekin, 1996).

56. This was one of the conclusions reached and the final call made in the report of the meeting attended by African Education Ministers and held in Johannesburg in February 1996 to assess EFA progress in East and Southern Africa (Chung, 1996b).

57. Interesting initiatives of citizen participation and monitoring in education emerged in a number of countries in recent years. In the case of Latin America, a pioneering effort was that of *Foro Educativo,* a civil association formed in Peru in 1992 to formulate educational policies and proposals on the basis of discussion and consensus-building. A more recent example is the *Observatorio Ciudadano de la Educación* created in Mexico in 1999, *"an open forum for citizens interested in educational problems in our country",* to *"critically observe the development of education and government policies in this sector".* It operates through a website and a fortnightly publication in *La Jornada*, one of Mexico's most important national newspapers (http://www.observatorio.org).

3. Diversity

Acknowledging diversity and the need for context-specific and culture-sensitive responses

"A question that repeatedly came up for discussion was that of the sustainability of innovative projects. Particular reference was made to measuresinitiated with financial support from external funding agencies. Invariably, once the financial assistance ends, the innovation is abandoned. Many expressed the need for long-term commitment on behalf of donor agencies to support successful innovative projects. Some of the participants emphasized that the funding agencies have to remain consistent in their policies and should not hastily introduce new ideas and projects giving up a country's ongoing efforts mid-stream. It was, of course, pointed out that innovations fail to take root not only because of a shortage of funds, but also because many of them are implanted from outside and do not evolve indigenously. As a result, they often remain alien and fail to fit into the socio-cultural ethos of the country. It was emphasized that relying on political will alone is not enough to implement policy decisions. Planners and administrators have also to become more cost-conscious and introduce explicit cost-effectiveness criteria in project design and implementation." (Report on the regional seminar organized by IIEP-UNESCO and UNICEF in Uganda to assess the progress of the first three years of EFA, IIEP Newsletter, Vol. XI, No. 4, Paris, IIEP-UNESCO, 1993.)

"While countries have many common concerns in meeting the basic learning needs of their populations, these concerns do, of course, vary in nature and intensity from country to country depending on the actual status of basic education as well as the cultural and socio-economic context." (Introduction, Framework for Action)

EFA recognizes *diversity* and *change:* basic learning needs -- and the means and methods to meet them -- are different in different cultures, social groups and contexts, and change with the passage of time. The Framework for Action underscored the need for each country to adapt principles and goals to country-specific objectives, mandates and constituencies and to establish its own program and timetable. This was reiterated in the successive documents produced by the EFA Forum. The need for flexibility and adaptability to local contexts and specific circumstances are almost compulsory paragraphs in recent international EFA documents. In practice, however, uniformity was the norm: EFA tended to be understood, and implemented, as a universal model.

The need for different strategies in different regions, and within each region and country, was reiterated by countries all over the world. This was the keynote of regional and subregional mid-decade assessment meetings,

and particularly the two meetings held in Africa (Yaounde and Johannesburg), which concluded that *"a carbon copy, rigid, one-approach system would be unsuitable"* (Chung, 1996b:5).

From the perspective of international agencies, flexibility of guidelines and plans of action was not only stated in documents, but also expressly recommended. From the standpoint of countries, however, EFA was perceived as a setting of universal parameters and goals. In the light of the dialectic relationship between donor agencies and countries, this decade of education policy in developing countries succeeded in espousing a single, paradigmatic pattern for education reform.[58]

In this sense, the 1990s were extremely paradoxical: never before had *diversity* been underlined to such an extent, and never before had policies, notably education policies, been so *uniform and global.* Under the banner of EFA and the "improvement of the quality of education", Third World countries ended up adopting a universal model of education reform, with similar policies, programs and projects the world over, from Asia to Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.

This uniformity is largely the result of the increasing role of international organizations in policy formulation on a global scale and particularly in relation to developing countries. This is notably the case of the World Bank, the strongest EFA partner, and the leading agency in the education sector in the 1990s.[59] The education reform package recommended to developing countries in the 1990s comprised among others (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991; World Bank, 1995; Coraggio & Torres, 1997; Torres, 1999a,b):

- international loans and technical advice, particularly from international banks, for the diagnosis, design and implementation of reforms, and the creation of executory units outside Ministries of Education to administer projects financed by such loans;
- predominance of economic analysis in defining problems and priorities (cost reduction and cost-benefit criteria defining policy-making);

58. Regarding this tension between "universal" and "specific" in the relationship between countries and international agencies, King points out the key role played by research conducted or released by agencies: *"the research results are framed in a fashion that makes for easy generalisation, even if the intention is not to fashion prescriptions"* (King, 1991: xi). One could add a similar comment about the way in which "innovations" or "good practices" are presented. Descriptions (boxes) of such programmes rarely include background or context, weaknesses and contradictions, and tend to be presented as a-historical and a-cultural models easily replicable and transplanted to any context.

59. *Improving Primary Education in Developing Countries* (M. Lockheed & A. Verspoor), released by the World Bank in 1990, became -- and was meant as -- a "recipe book" for decision-makers in developing countries, and one of the most quoted international publications on education in the 1990s.

- focus on basic education and transfer of resources from tertiary education;
- "focus on poverty" and "compensatory" or "positive discrimination" policies and programs for disadvantaged groups and sectors "at risk";
- priority to administrative reform vis a vis curriculum and pedagogical reform;
- decentralization of management and school autonomy, together with the promotion of school projects;
- focus on measuring school performance and creation of national evaluation /assessment systems and mechanisms;
- focus on education technologies and textbooks, in particular;
- support for distance education and self-instructional modalities and materials;
- freezing of teacher salaries and support for incentives based on performance (teacher professional performance measured in relation to student academic performance);
- support for in-service teacher training, including decentralized modalities in the supply of such training, support for horizontal forms of cooperation and learning among teachers, and school-based training;
- cost-sharing policies (communities and households contributing to the financing of education at the local level);
- consultation and agreements to validate policies, with new players such as NGOs and the private sector;
- package of measures and inputs to improve the quality of education in schools, including access to textbooks, increase in teaching time, increase in class sizes, multiple shifts to fully use school facilities, and in-service teacher training.

From the standpoint of international agencies, the "Third World" and "developing countries" (also called "low- and middle-income" countries and, more recently, "emerging" countries) constitute a conglomerate with common characteristics, which differentiate them from the other conglomerate identified as the "First World" or "developed" countries (or "industrialized" countries). Their diversity is essentially related to the division of regions and subregions [60]and to their level of income. In addition to the regional criterion, the

other criterion used to group and differentiate between countries within EFA was the extent to which countries were meeting (or close to meet) EFA goals: countries with high, medium and low probability of reaching such goals.[61]

A specific group was formed by the nine most populous countries in the world, for which a sub-initiative was launched in 1993 — known as E-9 — within the scope of EFA.[62] Three categories were also defined within these nine countries, according to their situation regarding EFA goals.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a proliferation of macrostudies, macrodiagnoses and macroproposals for educational policy in "developing countries".[63] Overly general and simplified recommendations on what to do, as well as weak scientific and research foundations underlying such generalizations, have been highlighted by numerous authors.[64] The predominance of the North, and particularly Anglo-American (especially US) culture, is manifest in these macrostudies and in the research that serves as a basis for policy recommendations to developing countries.[65] Research on education and educational change conducted in these countries — in Spanish, Portuguese, French, just to name a few majority languages — is rarely accessed or utilized by academic communities and aid agencies at the international level, and

60. The geographic regional groupings for the "developing world" vary according to different agencies. For example, the World Bank counts six regions -- Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, and South Asia -- while UNICEF divides Africa into Southern Africa (sub-Saharan Africa) and East and West Africa.

61. At some point, UNICEF assigned colours — red, green and blue — to each of these categories of countries.

62. These nine countries æ Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan æ account for over half the world's population, 70% of the world's adult illiterates and 70 million out-of-school children. The "Education for All in the Nine High Population Countries" Initiative *(E-9 Initiative)* was launched in 1993 and co-ordinated by UNICEF, UNESCO and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Interim assessment meetings were also held by the group. See EFA Forum, 1996a; Haq, 1996.

63. The book by M. Castells (*La era de la información.* Three volumes) is an exceptional *"deliberate attempt at multicultural intellectual production, both in terms of sources and references"* (Castells, 1997: 24).

64. For example, Bennell, 1996; Coraggio, 1998; Coraggio & Torres, 1997; De Tommasi et al., 1996; Easton & Klees, 1990; King, 1991, 1995; Klees, 1991; McGinn, 1997; Reimers, 1992; Riddell, 1997; Samoff, 1996; Samoff & Assié-Lumumba, 1995; Schwille, 1993; Torres, 1999b.

65. This is obviously the case in other fields and is also felt in other industrialized countries. In fact, *"numerous topics directly resulting from intellectual confrontation linked to specific US societal issues and universities have imposed themselves on the whole planet, in forms that appear to have no history (...). Thus globalized, in a strictly geographic sense, and at the same time particularized by the false rupture produced by conceptualization, these planetary commonplaces that repeated media messages gradually transform into universal common sense, succeed in making us forget that they originated from complex, controversial realities pertaining to a specific historical society, tacitly erected as a model and a measure for all things."* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1999: 9-10).

often simply serves to support or legitimize pre-conceived ideas and positions.[66]

Taking diversity into account means breaking away from conventional ways of thinking, of providing education and of devising education policy and reform, both nationally and internationally, inside and outside the school system. Abandoning centralized, homogeneous visions for a whole country, region or even the "Third World" or "developing countries", and recognizing specific contexts and differences, implies accepting the fact that countries must define their own policies in the light of their own realities and contexts, history and culture.

If the ultimate aim of education (and of the school system) is *learning*, and if learning can only take place when conditions (time, space, content, methods, administrative arrangements) meet the needs and interests of learners, diversity must become the norm, not the exception, in systems designed to meet such needs. The answer is not designing remedial and compensatory programs (for the poor, girls, indigenous groups, street and working children, migrant populations, repeaters, etc.), under the notion that there is one single pattern that defines ideal standards and expected results, but rather designing diversified education models that meet the specific needs of each group but ensuring, in each case, quality education, with similar learning expectations and equivalent achievement goals for all of them.

While the 1990s helped develop universal awareness and collective mobilization vis-à-vis education and the importance of the goals set at Jomtien, the future must involve affirming and refocusing on specific contexts, needs and potential. This implies thinking strategically, but acting urgently, placing priority on the education and training (and employment) of national/local human resources, and promoting country-specific research, aimed at understanding and solving specific problems in specific contexts. International cooperation can also play a key role here, by "teaching people how to fish" rather than "giving them (or loaning them money to buy) fish".[67]

We begin the new decade with a greater awareness of the limits of adopting a "one-size-fits-all" mentality in education and education reform, of the importance of relevant country-specific research, of the need of meaningful and broad social consultation and participation, if effective education change is to be achieved. Investing in endogenous human capabilities is key to the

66. The report on education policy published by the World Bank in 1995 and the book that served as a basis for WB's proposals to improve the quality of primary education (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991) exemplify this. The 1995 report bases its conclusions and recommendations on 274 bibliographic references, all of them written in English. The book by Lockheed & Verspoor counts 446 references, of which 441 are in English; two in French, two in Spanish and one in Portuguese (Torres, 1996c).

67. King & Singh (1991) point out that IDRC, in Canada, is one of the few agencies that prioritizes the development of national/local research competencies within its co-operation framework.

building of a relevant national education and social development project, deeply rooted in the local culture and context and founded on its own limits and possibilities.

4. The purpose and direction of educational change

A paradigmatic change, not more (or better) of the same

> *"To serve the basic learning needs of all requires more than a recommitment to basic education as it now exists. What is needed is an "expanded vision" that surpasses present resource levels, institutional structures, curricula, and conventional delivery systems while building on the best in current practices. New possibilities exist today which result from the convergence of the increase in information and the unprecedented capacity to communicate. We must seize them with creativity and a determination for increased effectiveness."* (Article 2, Shaping the Vision)
>
> *"UNESCO is also convinced that EFA cannot be achieved through a simply policy of more of the same. New thinking and fresh approaches are required.*
>
> *The necessary innovations must, however, not be imposed from the outside. In fact, many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America have come up with promising and viable innovations themselves — as if to prove that necessity is the mother of invention."* (Berstecher, 1992:7)

Education for All, as it was defined in 1990, constitutes a step toward building a new paradigm for education, not only *basic education* or *school education,* but *EDUCATION* as a whole.

The concept of *[Basic] Education* for All outlined at Jomtien provides a framework for (Torres, 1993):

- recapturing the dialectic unity between *teaching* and *learning,* and of *learning* as the primary objective of any education process (in a context that has traditionally focused on *teaching,* assuming learning as the automatic result of teaching), thus opening the way to rethink the current education model and to recover *the value and the meaning of learning* not only for pragmatic reasons but for the pleasure of learning.
- formulating a broad interpretation of *learning* and *knowledge,* where *knowing* and doing are viewed as an integrated whole *(competence).*
- refocusing on learners and on their central status and role within edu-

cation systems and pedagogical process, and revising the underlying concept of *student* that prevails in current school systems and practices.

- acknowledging that all — *children, youth and adults* — have learning needs to be met, thus opening new venues to enhance inter-generational learning and to articulate formal, non-formal and informal education.
- replacing *knowledge* at the heart of the education process (*what* is known, *what* is taught and *what* is learned, by both learners and teachers), and accepting a broad vision of knowledge that includes both *elaborated* (scientific, school-based) and *common* (popular) knowledge.
- reuniting *content* and *method* (pedagogical and curriculum aspects) in education theory and practice.
- reassessing the theoretical and practical meaning of *lifelong learning* and *learning how to learn* by focusing on *learning*, rather than on *education* or *teaching* (*learning* is not restricted to *teaching* or schooling; it begins at birth and lasts a lifetime).
- acknowledging *diversity, relativity* and *change* (in a field traditionally characterized by *uniform, universal* and *inflexible* norms and *unquestionable* truths) in terms of learning needs, environments, means and ways of meeting such needs.
- acknowledging the importance of personal *motivation* and *interest* in education and learning processes (often ignored behind the group, the class, schools statistics, and averages).
- rethinking education from the standpoint of *needs* and *demand* (in a field that has traditionally been driven by *supply*), thus allowing a new perspective to understand educational problems and solutions.
- linking *educational processes* to *social processes* (school and life, school and home, school culture and social culture, education and work, school curriculum and local reality, theory and practice), paving the way for building new bridges or for understanding those linkages in new ways.

All these elements are embedded in the concept of *Education for All,* inviting all of us to rethink the conventional education and school paradigm, build

new scenarios and relationships, and define a new common sense for education and education reform.

For conventional educational thinking, EFA appeared just as a list of quantitative goals for primary school access, enrollment and literacy, and the reiteration of old ideals and commitments to education. In fact, universalization of primary school, universal literacy, gender parity in education, early childhood development, emphasis on learning, the need for multisectoral policies, and improved international cooperation are all aspirations that have been present in educational discourse for several decades. However, putting all this into practice in a comprehensive manner would be a major innovation in itself. For that to happen it is necessary to understand that these elements make up a strategy for educational development and change, that they are not policy "options" that can be adopted or discarded as policy-makers see fit.

The argument that there was "nothing new" in EFA was strong in Latin America, but it was also heard in Asia and Africa. In different countries, many people perceived EFA as a new international initiative that would distract attention and resources, or simply add to other regional or subregional programs in process and co-ordinated by some of the same Jomtien sponsors.[68] The "absolutism" of EFA, espoused particularly by the international agencies involved, had a negative impact, giving sometimes the impression that the education field had no previous history, or that such history was divided into B.J. (Before Jomtien) and A.J. (After Jomtien).

Countries and agencies were eager to show results. Consequently, processes and strategies were overlooked in favor of short-term effects. The emphasis on quantitative indicators and coverage strengthened the quantitativist approach whereby *quantity* and *quality* become separate goals, and educational development becomes associated with *expansion* rather than with *transformation.* Agencies cultivated this tendency by continually pressuring countries to meet quantitative goals and increase school enrollments, particularly of girls. The race for numbers contributed to reducing *universalization* to *access, quality* to *efficiency, learning* to *school performance and expandedvision* to *increase in the number of years of study*. The urgency of implementing massive reforms diverted attention from the importance of experimentation; pilot projects gained bad reputation over the decade and were declared failed and useless. Lessons learned by countries and agencies vis-à-vis educational innovation -- keys for success and limits for scaling-up or for replicability in

68. In Latin America, for example, the three goals of the Major Project in the Field of Education (1981-2000) — universal primary education (enrollment), universal literacy and improving the quality and efficiency of education coincide with some of the EFA goals.

other contexts[69]-- tended to be forgotten. The fact is that, despite the focus on *quality* in educational rhetoric over the decade, no indicators were developed — as projected — to measure the quality of inputs, processes, results and impact. The 18 indicators proposed for the end-of-decade assessment illustrate this.

Not only the goals, but also the guiding principles of EFA — *expanded vision of basic education*, meeting *basic learning needs*, and focus on *learning* — remain a challenge beyond the year 2000. The overall EFA framework applies to education in a broad sense, and some of its key ideas and principles are in step with the new paradigm deemed necessary for education in the next century.

The Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (the Delors Report), released in 1996, complements and enriches various aspects of the EFA platform. (See Box 6).

Reaffirming *lifelong learning* or *learning throughout life* as the key to education in the twenty-first century, breaks with conventional categories related to age or educational levels, and transcends the classical distinctions between formal, non-formal and informal education, in-school and out-of-school education, or education, life and work.

In both developed and developing countries, and in public and private education systems, education needs major transformation, renewed institutions and strategies, renewed ways of thinking and acting. "Improving the quality" of an education and school system that is inadequate for the times and for the bulk of the world's population (children and youth, the poor), is a bad business for people, nations and funding agencies.

Education for All cannot be achieved with traditional mentalities and strategies, even if resources are injected, timetables are delayed and new technologies are incorporated. Ensuring *Education for All* implies a new mindset, a new conceptual and operational framework that integrates education and politics, education and the economy, education and culture, education and citizenship, education policy and social policy, bottom-up and top-down educational change, the local, the national and the global. *Education for All* can only be attained by adopting a genuinely expanded and renewed vision of

69. *"Educational practice is site-specific, and innovations for school improvement cannot be transferred easily. Experimentation and local adaptation are essential. (...) Successful programs aim at comprehensive change, but adopt a phased implementation strategy with considerable experimentation and testing in the early phases."* These are some of the lessons learned by the World Bank after 20 years of investing in primary education in 51 developing countries (Verspoor, 1991:344).

education, which trusts and invests in people, in their capacities and potential, in the development and synchronization of resources and efforts of society at large to work together to make education a *need* and a *task* for all.

This means promoting "learning communities" (Torres, 1998) in which all educational and cultural resources of a given territorial and social community are pooled and leveraged to meet the basic learning needs of its members æ children, youth and adults, individuals and families. As a matter of policy, both at the national and local level, this implies:

- Assuming that *all human communities have learning resources, agents, institutions and networks operating,* which need to be identified, supported, developed and linked in the effort to build a community-based educational and cultural project that is based on specific needs and possibilities.
- Focusing on *learning* rather than *education,* identifying all learning resources and environments in the community: families, schools, nature, information and communication media, churches, workplace, street life, clubs, libraries, community centers, playgrounds and sports grounds, cooperatives, back gardens, cinemas and theaters, museums, zoos, circus, etc.
- Involving children, youth and adults, enabling *inter-generational and inter-peer learning,* acknowledging the importance of adult education (parents, educators of all types, members of the community and adults in general) for the education and well-being of children and youth, and liberating the potential of youth as educators and active agents of their own education, of school change and of family and local community development.
- Fostering *the pursuit and respect of differences,* recognizing that each group and community has specific realities, needs and resources that will shape specific educational and cultural projects.
- Ensuring *positive discrimination strategies* so as to make sure that economic, social, educational and cultural differences among communities do not become a source of inequality.

Creating "comprehensive territorial education plans" (Coll, 1999:18-19) has been suggested as a strategy to put this type of proposal into practice. Such plans must:

a) adopt a broad and systemic vision of education, i.e. take into account contexts, practices and educators that actually exist in the territory;

b) start by identifying, analyzing and appraising the basic learning needs of the population;

c) be participatory, in terms of formulation, development and implementation;

d) clearly establish the commitments and responsibilities of all bodies and educators involved;

e) set up a single body for planning, implementation and monitoring that involves representatives from the various administrative levels and sectors;

f) enjoy autonomy in implementation and development;

g) define and include from the outset specific assessment procedures and strategies;

h) ensure the necessary economic and technical resources.

Finally, it must be underlined that progress or change in education will not be attained unless sectoral thinking is abandoned.

The priority accorded to basic education in the 1990s responded to social and political issues, to reasons of equity and social justice, rather than to technical issues. "Education to alleviate poverty" was the watchword of the decade, driving the Education for All initiative. However, basic education did gain currency in developing countries in the 1990s, but so did poverty.

The major EFA objective, the important social goal attributed to basic education, has not been achieved. There is thus no reason to abandon basic education and move on to something else. The commitment remains to meet the basic learning needs of all, but, above all, to fight poverty. This requires direct, comprehensive and consistent interventions, not only in the educational arena but in the realm of economics and politics.

Box 6

Some pointers and recommendations from the Delors report
1. *Learning throughout life* is a key organizing concept for education in the twenty-first century. It links up with the concept of a *learning society.* This implies diversifying forms of learning and seeking new forms of certification in order to recognize all types of learning inside and outside school systems.
2. Education throughout life is based on four pillars: *learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together* and *learning to be.*
3. Education is a community asset which cannot be regulated by market forces alone.
4. The role of teachers is irreplaceable and must be upgraded. New technologies can only support and complement teachers' work.
5. Secondary education is one of the major priorities and must be rethought in the general context of learning throughout life.
6. Traditional vertical reform has failed. Active social participation and consultation must be involved in education reform decision-making and processes.
7. International cooperation in the field of education has to be radically rethought, given the poor results obtained despite resources invested and efforts made.

Source:

J. Delors et al., *Learning: the treasure within,* Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, Paris, UNESCO, 1996.

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