Preparation of national plans of action

Country guidelines
For further information, please contact
Office of the Assistant Director-General for Education
UNESCO
7, Place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP, France
Phone: +33 (0) 1 45 68 10 00
Fax: +33 (0) 1 45 68 56 29
E-mail: efa@unesco.org
Web site: www.unesco.org

Editorial co-ordination ➤ Ulrika PEPPLER BARRY

Text prepared by ➤ Mark RICHMOND

Editorial team ➤ Francoise ARNAUD-DEMIR,
Karine BRUN, Wenda McNEVIN,
Francisco SANDOVAL

Graphic design ➤ Sylvaine BAIEYENS

Printing ➤ GRAPHOPRINT
FOREWORD

Country Guidelines on the Preparation of National EFA Plans of Action has been produced in order to provide an orientation about how the process of follow-up to the World Education Forum, Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000, may be organized at the country level. They are not a technical planning tool nor are they narrowly prescriptive, except insofar as they incorporate the commitments freely made by the participants in Dakar. Rather, they should be seen as an encouragement of partnership and collaboration between all the actors involved. There is so much to do but the enormity of the EFA challenge becomes more manageable if we work together. To assist this process of building partnerships and developing a shared understanding of what is needed, the guidelines seek to answer some basic questions. They also raise some questions that can only be answered properly in practice by those dealing actively and directly with issues of basic education at the country level.

The World Education Forum served many purposes: to take stock of achievements and shortfalls in EFA during the ten years since the global goals for Education For All (EFA) had been agreed in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990; to identify the goals, strategies and actions that will shape the pursuit of a quality basic education for all in the years ahead and promote its achievement by 2015 at the latest; and to strengthen the determination of all partners - at national, regional and international levels - to fulfil their individual and collective commitments. In the most simple terms, the Dakar Framework for Action expressed a collective commitment to ensure that the right to a basic education of good quality is fully achieved.

These guidelines, of course, will not be the only form of technical advice and orientation but they are a starting point that, we hope, will prove useful in a broad range of national contexts. Naturally, as a learning institution, UNESCO would like to hear from those active at the country level about their efforts regarding Dakar follow-up, especially their experience of establishing and/or strengthening national EFA forums and their approach to generating national EFA plans. There are lessons to be learned and good practices to be shared.

We welcome your feedback and ideas.

Jacques Hallak
Assistant Director-General for Education,
UNESCO
1. Introduction: the focus on action

1.1 These general guidelines are intended to provide an orientation to countries about how to generate their own approach towards achieving Education for All (EFA) and how to set their own courses towards these goals. They do not provide a perfect recipe or a methodological blueprint that should be applied mechanically in every country, with a guarantee of total success. Thus, despite the language of recommendations and advice, the message of these guidelines is quite clear: each country has the responsibility for choosing for itself the path it will follow in pursuit of the goals of EFA, consistent with the commitments it has made. Each country’s approach to EFA planning should reflect this sense of responsibility and become one means through which national ownership and direction of EFA efforts are pursued.

1.2 The World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000, culminated in the adoption of the Dakar Framework for Action, which embodies a revitalized collective commitment to achieve Education for All by 2015. The emphasis of the Dakar Framework is unmistakably upon the need for well-directed, determined action to ensure the fulfilment in practice of the commitments made not only in Dakar but also at a series of international meetings in the 1990s as well as through the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The time has come for promises to be kept and for commitments to be fulfilled as far as the right to education is concerned. The Dakar Framework is a call to action.

1.3 A recurrent theme running through the Framework is the recommendation that the mechanisms for implementing the goals and strategies of EFA should be participatory and, wherever possible, should be built on what exists; this applies to the national level as well as the regional and international levels. This recognition of the existing basis for immediate action is grounded upon common sense and an appreciation of the worth of past achievements, the usefulness of existing mechanisms and strategies, and the availability of considerable information and evidence, particularly that generated through the EFA 2000 Assessment process. The latter also provided an opportunity in a number of countries to develop productive intra-governmental working relationships that bridged ministerial and departmental boundaries and forged links with partners outside government such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In addition to those countries that have sustained, since Jomtien, an active EFA-focused co-ordination between government and civil society, the EFA 2000 Assessment process has furnished extremely useful experience of how country-based partnerships can be mobilized around EFA. This experience, in fact, is invaluable and the lessons it can offer, both positive and negative, should provide the starting-point for Dakar follow-up at the country level.
1.4 Two important considerations, however, must be taken into account. First, the content and character of partnerships developed through the EFA 2000 Assessment process were shaped by the specific focus of that exercise. Second, echoing the Jomtien conference ten years earlier, the Dakar Framework for Action calls for a broad national partnership between government and civil society in order to secure the full realization of EFA goals and strategies. Such a partnership may be a new experience for those inside as well as outside government. It is partly for this reason that the Dakar Framework for Action represents such a challenge: it calls for massive efforts to achieve goals never attained before through forms of collaboration and participation with which many countries have little familiarity. Clearly, the message of Dakar is not one of complacency; on the contrary, it is a wake-up call and an invitation to act both urgently and in a sustained way during the years ahead. It is hoped that these guidelines will prove helpful to those who take up this invitation.

2. The purpose of these guidelines

2.1 The substantial efforts made by individual countries over many decades, the achievements of the post-Jomtien decade of EFA activities, the EFA 2000 Assessment process and the meeting of the World Education Forum in Dakar provide in their various ways a strong momentum for change and, through the Dakar Framework, an agenda for action. The main aim of these guidelines is to help maintain that momentum and to stimulate countries to increase their efforts in the light of the Dakar Framework for Action and the regional action plans agreed at regional conferences related to the EFA 2000 Assessment exercise. It is clearly recognized that the vitality of the EFA movement after Dakar rests upon the energy, creativity and abilities of the EFA partners at the country level; it is they who must find viable and enterprising ways to incorporate the goals and strategies of EFA into policies, programmes and actions that address local realities and respond to local needs.

2.2 The foundation of these guidelines is a simple idea: namely, the nature of the goal should decisively shape the character of the process through which that goal is to be achieved. In this particular case, the result or outcome addressed by these guidelines is the refinement or generation of credible national EFA plans by 2002 at the latest; this requires real effort, especially where nothing currently exists. Such plans are vital within the perspective of the Dakar Framework for Action because they constitute not only each country’s design for achieving the goals of EFA within a generation but also the basis on which the international community will support, in a co-ordinated, coherent and consistent way, national EFA efforts.

2.3 Probably the most resounding declaration expressed by the participants in the World Education Forum at Dakar is the following: ‘We affirm that no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources.’ One indispensable element and sign of that serious commitment is the production of a realistic national EFA plan, but it is clear that the participants in Dakar wanted more than a mere document. After all, countries all over the world have an abundant experience of paper plans that were never implemented and, in some cases, were never intended for implementation. The challenge presented by the Dakar Framework for Action is two-fold: first, the process through which the national EFA plan is generated should fulfil in a convincing way what the Framework requires; and second, the plan and its implementation should receive the clearest possible support of the country’s highest political leaders. A lack of genuine high-level political will
towards enacting the plan would serve to undermine confidence in the seriousness or credibility of the commitment to EFA.

3. National EFA forums

3.1 While the EFA movement is truly global in its scope and significance, the Dakar Framework for Action is unambiguous in its identification of where the main focus of action is and must be: ‘The heart of EFA activity lies at the country level.’ At this level, moreover, it is the government which is to take the lead and assume the greatest responsibility when it comes to orchestrating efforts towards achieving EFA: ‘Governments have an obligation to ensure that EFA goals and targets are reached and sustained’. However, the responsibility for pursuing the goal of EFA is not the government’s alone but in fact it is a task for the whole of society and from which the whole of society should benefit. Some support and assistance, furthermore, will also come from a range of international sources.

3.2 A key recommendation of the Dakar Forum is that a broad-based national partnership should be cultivated which brings together both government and civil society as well as other partners, national and international, in a common endeavour: to achieve and sustain good quality basic education for all as soon as possible, and by 2015 at the latest. In some countries, such a partnership already exists; in others, it has lost momentum or is only just emerging; in yet others, it has not really started. However, given the scale of the EFA challenge in the years ahead, such a partnership needs to be encouraged, supported, organized and strengthened; the best results will not happen just by chance. Therefore, it is recommended that a designated mechanism, a ‘national EFA forum’, be entrusted with the task of cultivating this national partnership.

3.3 Some countries may have a kind of national EFA forum already but it will go under another name or may perform some functions but not others. The EFA 2000 Assessment process, for example, generated a co-ordination group that, with some adaptations, could be transformed into a national EFA forum. Alternatively, without necessarily having any specific reference to EFA, several mechanisms of dialogue, interaction and collaboration may exist that bring together different or sometimes overlapping groups of government officials, NGOs and international agencies to address national educational issues. The immediate choice facing each country is whether to use an existing structure or to create a new one.

Q. What exactly is a national EFA forum?
A. A national EFA forum is a consultative and co-ordination body that brings together around one table the representatives of all those with a vital stake in basic education. It is both a vehicle of partnership and dialogue and a co-ordinating mechanism focused on the planning, analysis and monitoring of progress towards set goals.

Q. Will a national EFA forum be a policy body or simply another talking-shop?
A. Everything ultimately depends upon the members: their ability and determination to make this partnership work and their efforts to mobilize interest, commitment and support. Success will require sustained and conscientious participation in all aspects of the planning process and careful attention to emerging problems, neglected groups and gaps in provision. Not to be forgotten are the interest, support,
help and guidance that will come from the regional level and from the global EFA movement led by UNESCO.

Q. What are the essential aims of a national EFA forum?
A. In pursuit of the overall goal of achieving more rapid progress towards good quality basic education for all by 2015 at the latest, the aims of a national EFA forum are:

- To ensure that the EFA goals of Dakar are met;
- To shape the development of government plans, policies and strategies, especially but not only in the education sector, so that the goals and priorities of EFA are given due emphasis;
- To promote and develop effective relations of partnership by means of dialogue, collaboration and co-ordination;
- To harness the forces of partnership to ensure that all EFA-related planning, through its entire process, is as effective and efficient as possible;
- To monitor and report regularly on national EFA activities and to prepare strategies to improve performance where progress towards EFA is slow or to address new or deepening problems of access, equity or quality;
- To foster increased and sustained commitment among all partners and stakeholders, and in the society at large.

Other purposes compatible with the above will certainly be added in particular countries.

Q. What are the main functions or tasks to be undertaken by a national EFA forum?
A. In order to achieve the goals of the Dakar Framework for Action, the main functions of a national EFA forum are:

- **Advocacy**: each forum should become a champion of EFA and should make the case for quality basic education whenever and wherever it can, particularly for the benefit of those who are ill-served or unreached by the existing provision of formal and non-formal education;
- **Resource mobilization**: all types of resources (financial, material and human) and all sources of support (government, the private sector, communities, international donors and agencies) should figure in the forum’s resource mobilization strategy;
- **Monitoring**: each forum should keep a watchful eye on the EFA situation and should focus especially on whether learning achievement is at the centre of EFA-related actions and whether excluded groups or marginalized populations are being reached effectively; appropriate reporting mechanisms should be put in place so that the results of monitoring are incorporated into processes of policy review and strategy revision;
- **Generation and sharing of EFA-related information**: under the auspices of each forum, studies and analyses of EFA-related activities should be undertaken and distributed; in addition, each forum will be a conduit for sharing information about EFA inside the country as well as for exchanging information with regional and international bodies.

As experience and the sharing of good practice accumulate, these functions will evolve quite naturally. Suffusing several, if not all, of the above-mentioned functions
are various dimensions of communication: dialogue, exchange, persuasion, promotion, observation, information, etc. Communication, in fact, will become the life-blood of the forum; in view of this, attention should be paid to developing skills and capacity in this area, not least in the field of media relations.

Q. At the country level, who are the main EFA partners and stakeholders?
A. A national EFA forum should include key representatives from relevant government ministries and departments and from relevant parts of ‘civil society’, that is, those associations and social institutions that organize citizens’ interests and express their views. It is important that, from the government, it is not just the Ministry of Education that participates in the forum; the Ministry of Finance should participate as should those ministries that undertake youth and adult training, literacy programmes and non-formal education such as the Ministry of Youth, the Ministry for Women and Family Affairs, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Employment. In addition, representation of sub-national levels of educational authority (e.g. from the provincial and municipal levels) should be considered. The membership of the forum from civil society should be drawn from educational stakeholders such as community leaders, parents, learners, teachers’ associations, higher education institutions such as universities, NGOs, employers’ groups, research institutes, women’s groups, churches, associations representing indigenous groups or minorities, and so forth. As a clear signal that the forum’s vision is genuinely inclusive, serious efforts should be made to secure the representation of social groups that traditionally are poorly served by the education system.

Q. What other types of partners and stakeholders should participate in a national EFA forum?
A. It is recommended that the forum should include representatives from the economic sector (both public and private) and from the international community: for example, United Nations agencies (UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and others), multilateral donors (such as the World Bank, the European Union and regional banks), bilateral donors (the development assistance branches of foreign governments) and international NGOs.

Q. Should representatives of the international community be included as members of a national EFA forum?
A. This is a matter to be decided by the national members. Opinions and situations will vary from one country to another. However, even if they are not included as full members, it is recommended that representatives of the international community should participate as technical advisors, observers or facilitators; in other words, as interested partners. The important thing is that leadership of the EFA process is always in the hands of national authorities.

Q. Does the name ‘National EFA Forum’ have to be used?
A. Calling the partnership and co-ordination mechanism the ‘National EFA Forum’ is desirable and should be encouraged; however, if this creates more problems than benefits there is no reason to insist. The important thing is that, whatever its name, some recognized body should pursue the aims, fulfil the functions and perform the tasks associated with this role. There may be an existing mechanism that is selected
by the government and agrees to undertake this role but, for the sake of identity and continuity, the original name of the body may be retained. On the other hand, where there is no such mechanism or where no existing body is willing to assume the role or where none is found entirely suitable, a new body should be created. In the latter case, the name of ‘National EFA Forum’ normally should be adopted. Naturally, there should be only one mechanism that is recognized by the government as fulfilling the role of the national EFA forum; once so designated, this mechanism should be seen as the national focal point for EFA by regional and international bodies.

Q. What should be the size of a national EFA forum?
A. The size is a matter for the original members to decide upon but then to keep under review. If there are too few members, the forum could well be accused of being unrepresentative. If there are too many members, its work could become unwieldy. Perhaps a maximum of twenty active, regular members should be aimed for. Some form of rotation or substitution might be adopted in order to secure the advantages of both manageable size and wide representation. Other vehicles of participation include working groups focused on specific issues or targets (such as early childhood care, girls’ education or women’s literacy) and affiliation arrangements whereby groups, institutions and individuals join the forum as affiliated members as a sign of their interest in improving basic education in the country and their commitment to the national and international goals of EFA.

Q. How should a national EFA forum be organized?
A. The leadership and structure of the forum should be agreed upon at an early stage by the members and then reviewed periodically as to whether it is satisfactory or not. One option that might be considered is that the chair should come from the Ministry of Education while the deputy chair should be drawn from the civil society representation. One advantage of this option is that there would be one individual clearly authorized to act as the official spokesperson of the national EFA forum and as the contact person for communications to and from regional and international EFA bodies. Alternatives include the idea of such roles being filled on a rotational basis from amongst the membership of the forum or the adoption of a team approach. In addition, it should be anticipated that the work of the national EFA forum will need to be supported by a small secretariat whose members should be drawn from both government and civil society. A part from helping to organize meetings of the forum, maintain the flow of correspondence and respond to requests for information, the secretariat will support the functioning of any working groups established by the forum and the preparation of conferences or workshops.

Q. Should EFA forums be established at the sub-national level?
A. This is certainly an option to be considered and for some countries, particularly those that are geographically large or are organized federally, it may provide one way through which the vision and practice of EFA can spread within the society. For most countries, however, the most important task is to ensure that the national EFA forum establishes close links with government authorities, networks, institutions and communities that are active in basic education at the province/prefecture/county levels and municipal or district levels. The forum should be a catalyst of improvement in basic education by becoming an intermediary between those with unmet educational needs and those with knowledge, skills and resources.
Q. Will a national EFA forum receive help from the regional level?
A. There already exist a number of regional and subregional organizations, associations and networks devoted to improving education in individual countries. These bodies, many of which are concerned with basic education, will continue to provide advice and assistance. The regional level also figured prominently in the post-Jomtien decade through mid-decade conferences and the EFA 2000 Assessment, which generated cross-national analyses and strategies that should prove useful in the period ahead. In addition, regional EFA forums will soon be established that will support national EFA efforts through network co-ordination, the promotion of partnerships and technical co-operation, advice and guidance on how to organize EFA activities, target-setting and monitoring at regional and sub-regional levels, the sharing of good practices and lessons learned from successful innovations, policy dialogue, advocacy and resource mobilization. Each national EFA forum will be a member of a regional EFA forum, which in turn will be accountable to the national forums.

Q. What should happen in those war-torn or crisis-ridden countries where normal patterns of social, economic and political life have broken down?
A. The creation of a national EFA forum, let alone the generation of a national EFA plan, will prove very difficult in some countries where the structure and sovereignty of the state itself may be in ruins. In such situations, the United Nations may temporarily be in the best position to organize the integration of EFA-related concerns into stabilization, rehabilitation and reconstruction processes. However, efforts should be made to secure the participation of national society and community representatives in any co-ordination and consultative mechanisms that are established; the seeds of future partnership arrangements may be sown in this way. What is most important is that organized learning activities are resumed whenever and wherever possible, and that the destruction of education systems, both physically and organizationally, should be reduced to a minimum.

3.4 Emerging from the Dakar Forum and in view of the firm commitments made there, a number of immediate actions should be taken in order to establish and/or strengthen national EFA forums. The detailed specification of these actions can only be done by the responsible governmental authorities at the country level (typically the Ministry of Education) in consultation with their partners. However, the following questions should help to clarify what are the next steps to be taken:

(i) Does any group or body resembling a national EFA forum currently exist?
(ii) Is this body involved in processes of policy formulation and implementation?
    If so, in what ways?
(iii) Is this body willing and able to take on the role of national EFA forum?
(iv) If no such body exists, who should be invited to help design and set up the national EFA forum?
(v) Who should be informed and consulted about this process?
(vi) What are the criteria for selecting the full membership of the forum?
(vii) How broad should the membership be?
(viii) How might conflicts of opinion about membership be resolved?
(ix) How might conflicts of opinion about the aims, functions and tasks of the Forum be resolved?
(x) What measures need to be taken to ensure that the forum is transparent, accountable and democratic?

(xi) How soon should the first meeting of the forum take place?

(xii) What should be the priority items on the agenda of this first meeting?

(xiii) What kinds of assistance from the international community might the forum need in order to undertake its immediate tasks effectively?

(xiv) What kinds of information does the forum need in order to embark upon the task of devising a national EFA plan?

**Each national EFA plan will:**

(i) be developed by government leadership in direct and systematic consultation with national civil society;

(ii) attract co-ordinated support of all development partners;

(iii) specify reforms addressing the six EFA goals;

(iv) establish a sustainable financial framework;

(v) be time-bound and action-oriented;

(vi) include mid-term performance indicators; and

(vii) achieve a synergy of all human development efforts, through its inclusion within the national development planning framework and process.

Source: Dakar Framework for Action, para. 16

**4. Preparing a national EFA plan**

4.1 The point of departure for the preparation of a national EFA plan that should be ready by 2002 at the latest – sooner if possible – is the information, strategies and plans that currently exist in regard to each country. Useful sources will include the following:

- The evidence amassed during the national, regional and thematic EFA 2000 Assessment process; in addition to basic data, the assessment reports contain up-to-date analyses of the strengths and weaknesses of country-level performance vis-à-vis basic education over the past decade as well as recommendations for future action and an outline of suitable strategies. The regional ‘framing’ of national plans and performance is particularly useful, not least for the perspective provided by the experiences of neighbouring countries.

- Other national and/or regional surveys and studies in the fields of education, demography, employment, etc., through which education-related and contextual knowledge has been accumulated.

- Present national sector strategies and plans for the education sector and for other sectors: the latter are important not only because, directly or indirectly, they influence what can be achieved in the education sector but also because there are basic education programmes and activities occurring in these sectors too.

In countries where existing information is unreliable, outdated or incomplete or where there are competing or incompatible sets of data and strategies within the same sector, the preparation of a national EFA plan provides an excellent opportunity to bring interested parties together to improve the situation.
4.2 This thorough mapping of what currently exists should be accompanied by an awareness that the creation of national EFA plans does not imply the complete abandonment of what is already in place or the generation of a separate, ‘stand-alone’ or parallel plan for basic education. Such a requirement is neither realistic nor desirable. The main significance of Dakar is that it signals a collective commitment to press ahead more strongly and more effectively towards reaching certain goals and targets for basic education within a specified period of time. This boost for basic education will definitely take place, in which case there will be implications for what currently exists and what has been projected and planned. Clearly, if more rapid progress in basic education is pursued with renewed vigour and extra resources, if new or strengthened partnerships are formed at the country level, if closer integration with efforts to reduce poverty and accelerate socio-economic development is accomplished, and if better ways of improving and monitoring learning achievement are implemented, this will have far-reaching effects. This is precisely the point of the categorical statement within the Dakar Framework for Action that identifies education as ‘the key to sustainable development and peace and stability within and among countries’.

4.3 The above-mentioned effects will include certain immediate types of changes. The projection of a sustained boost to basic education during the next fifteen years will need to be accommodated within existing plans and strategies but, relatively soon, this process of accommodation will require modifications and adaptations, perhaps of significant dimensions. It is vital, therefore, for existing plans and strategic designs to be re-visited and their adequacy for the post-Dakar scenario to be reviewed. In turn, ideas for the reform and expansion of basic education will need to be adapted to structured frameworks and ongoing processes that have time-frames of up to ten years. Clearly, such changes will require negotiation and re-negotiation among all interested parties. In view of the complexities and sensitivities involved in the changes, accommodations and negotiations required, the deadline of ‘2002 at the latest’ for the elaboration of national EFA plans is a sobering one.

4.4 Thus, the generation of a national EFA plan, building and improving upon existing sources of information and strategy, will necessitate decisive actions in the immediate period ahead as well as a sustained commitment to a multi-faceted process of change. While each country must elaborate its own plan to suit its own distinctive conditions and within specific frameworks of strategy, planning and policy, it is possible to identify several broad areas of improvement relevant to this task, namely:

a) the clear support the plan must have from political leaders and the country at large;

b) the way in which the plan should give ‘substance and form’ to the Dakar goals and strategies, and to the commitments made in a series of international conferences in the 1990s;

c) the budgetary prioritization that should be given to basic education until EFA is achieved and then sustained;

d) the way the plan must be integrated within a wider poverty reduction and development framework;

e) the elaboration of clear strategies within the plan for addressing the special problems of those excluded from educational opportunities;

f) the participatory character of the process through which the plan is to be generated;

g) the role to be played by international agencies and the international community more broadly.
4.5 Each of these areas of improvement will now be examined in turn with a view to clarifying what should be done at the country level in order to produce a national EFA plan that is credible and thereby merits the co-ordinated and enhanced support of international agencies and institutions.

a) Political and social support

The inherent or perceived importance of education is no guarantee that it will be accorded the degree of high-level political support or broad-based social support that would make a difference to the realization of EFA. The Dakar Framework for Action is quite forthright on this matter: ‘Political will and stronger national leadership are needed for the effective and successful implementation of national plans in each of the countries concerned.’ This concern should be taken seriously by those orchestrating the national EFA effort; more will be needed than just the support of ministers and leaders of civil society. What form of support from the national political leadership should be sought?

Support will also be needed from every level of society; to achieve this, every step possible must be taken to make education for all a major issue for debate and thought. This will require engaging the interest of parents, communities, employers, educational professionals and learners themselves. It will also mean mobilizing those who form, shape and disseminate public opinion: the media, intellectuals and leading public personalities from all areas of activity.

The six EFA goals

We hereby collectively commit ourselves to the attainment of the following goals:

(i) expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
(ii) ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
(iii) ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes;
(iv) achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;
(v) eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;
(vi) improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

Source: Dakar Framework for Action, para. 7
b) Substance and form

The commitments freely given by governments at international conferences and in a range of multilateral and bilateral agreements do not directly or automatically have an impact upon the lives of ordinary people. To have such an impact, they have to be expressed in a country's specific strategies, policies and programmes, and then be translated into concrete, consequential actions. The Dakar Framework for Action could not be clearer on this point: while each national EFA plan should 'specify reforms addressing the six EFA goals', each plan should also 'give substance and form to the goals and strategies' laid out in the Dakar Framework and in 'the commitments made during a succession of international conferences in the 1990s'. How, then, should 'substance and form' be given to these commitments?

In practice, most countries have many of the necessary elements already available in the shape of school construction programmes, textbook production and distribution, adult literacy schemes in rural areas, vocational skills training for youth and other activities in the field. The majority of these activities owe their origins not to the enunciation of goals in distant conference halls but to unresolved difficulties arising in the society and its education system. It is these problems, pressures and needs, given a specific form by the character of a particular country, that should lie at the heart of a national EFA plan. The vitality and relevance of the plan will reside in whether it addresses real problems and issues in a systematic way, not whether it formally mentions the main goals of EFA.

This does not mean, however, that the specific inclusion of the six EFA goals in the national EFA plan is unimportant. After all, the goals will play a useful role in structuring activities in a meaningful way and will provide clear benchmarks for judging the trend of achievement and performance. Consequently, the plan of action should indicate how specific measures such as lengthening the school day, re-writing a series of history textbooks or building separate toilets for girls will bring the fulfilment of a particular EFA goal closer. In addition, with a view to achieving a particular goal more comprehensively or more rapidly, the plan should specify the increases in inputs and levels of activity required over a specified period of time in order to have the intended effect. It is here that broad-based consultation, technical advice and an integrated approach are so important in order to ascertain whether a specific increase in inputs (e.g. funding of an increased number of places for primary teacher education) will be adequate or appropriate (recruitment incentives and prospective salaries may be too low; a high proportion of graduates may die of AIDS or desert the teaching profession within a year or two of qualification; the real teacher education priority may be at the lower secondary level). The selection of priority actions, therefore, should be undertaken carefully and those actions should be monitored through measurable indicators of performance or achievement; if evidence can be found to show that implementation is inadequate, timely adjustments may be undertaken. However, it is vital that, in the process of formulating, implementing and monitoring the national EFA plan, sight is not lost of the actual problems and unmet needs that it should be addressing. The key test of a plan is not the elegance of its design but whether the plan is implemented effectively so that real improvements occur.

Q. Are the six EFA goals equally important for all countries?

A. In principle, the answer is 'yes': the fulfilment of each goal is vital for all countries and for the fulfilment of the other goals in the perspective of EFA as a whole. In practice, however, the education systems of different countries have evolved differently; as a result, some countries are much further ahead than others in regard to, say, female literacy rates or the quality of learning achievement in mathematics in Grade 4 of primary school. Within a context of scarce resources, each country has to decide
where its own priorities lie and which strategies and associated actions will achieve the greatest benefit. Within such a prioritization, however, there should be a place for all six EFA goals. Moreover, the national EFA plan should indicate clearly when and how a goal at present receiving a reduced priority will be accorded greater importance.

C) Budgetary prioritization

The EFA 2000 Assessment process threw into sharp relief the long-standing and dramatic shortages of funding that exist in many countries. As a practical measure designed to overcome problems of ‘chronic under-financing of basic education’ and as a sign of the seriousness of the government’s intent over a sustained period of time, the Dakar Framework for Action calls for national EFA plans that establish ‘budget priorities that reflect a commitment to achieving EFA goals and targets at the earliest possible date, and no later than 2015’. Such a prioritization in favour of basic education should be linked to the requirement that each plan should establish a sustainable financial framework, a requirement that enjoins the government to hold good to its financial commitments to basic education by protecting this area of expenditure from temporary cuts in funding or reductions in the rate of expenditure increase needed to meet future EFA targets.

However, since national resources will be unable to meet all needs, including those that have been prioritized, the plan should be clear about exactly where the gaps are located and how, i.e. through what strategy and actions, those gaps may be filled. An active search for new and alternative sources of funding should be conducted.

d) An integrated plan

If basic education is to enjoy financial prioritization over a considerable period of time, this should not be achieved at the cost of other areas of government action that are integrally related to EFA enhancement, such as other types of poverty alleviation programmes or health and sanitation measures. Hence the emphasis within the Dakar Framework of Action upon the integration of the national EFA plan into the overall national education plan which, in turn, is embedded within the framework of the country’s development strategies and poverty reduction programmes. Through the incorporation of the EFA plan within ongoing processes of reforming the national education system, an extra impetus may be given to the pace of change and improvement. In these ways, the ‘synergy of all human development efforts’ within a country can be enhanced.

At the country level, there exist several frameworks into which the national EFA plan will need to be incorporated, such as: the national education sector plan, in which projections for secondary and higher education, for example, will need to be adjusted in view of EFA expansion; overall development strategy; and poverty reduction programmes. In this regard, it is vital for governments to ensure that the goals, strategies, targets and activities expressed in national EFA plans are reflected consistently throughout their own operations and in their dealings with United Nations-led frameworks and strategies. Of particular importance is the consistency between the provisions of the national EFA plan and those contained in the education-related sections of other plans and strategic instruments such as United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF), Country Assistance Strategy (CAS), etc. Since the national EFA plan is not meant to have a separate operational existence alongside other plans but should be infused into them and thereby shape their formulation,
revision and implementation, it is vital for EFA to be well understood and if possible ‘owned’ by other mechanisms of strategic design and planning; for example, the agenda of EFA should be integrated with the agenda of poverty reduction, to the advantage of both.

Consequently, national EFA forum meetings should welcome the participation of key figures involved in these other frameworks of strategy and planning. By the same measure, forum members should participate in these frameworks and ensure that the agenda of basic education is promoted. Through regular dialogue, the sharing of information, the design of common solutions and the co-ordination of actions, not only the forum but also other educational groups inside and outside government should encourage an integrated approach to educational development. Among the important questions that will almost certainly arise from such processes of interaction are the following:

- What resources for EFA are actually available from different sources (national, multilateral, bilateral, and/or private)?
- What gaps in resources exist or are anticipated?
- What are the most important areas of identified need?
- What are the time-frames of action within which these needs will be met?
- What capacity building measures are essential for EFA progress?
- What are the forms and timing of the international technical assistance that is required?
- By what mechanisms can double-counting of assistance be avoided?

**e) Strategies for the excluded**

Each national EFA plan is expected to elaborate clear strategies about how the special problems of those excluded from educational opportunities can best be addressed. While particular emphasis should be placed on girls’ education and gender equality, all categories of the excluded or marginalized should receive attention, notably:

- ethnic minorities;
- children in need of special protection or children adversely affected by crisis and conflict (e.g. street children, working children, child soldiers and children orphaned by HIV/AIDS);
- linguistic minorities;
- children with special needs (e.g. with disabilities);
- refugee children and youth;
- children of the internally displaced (IDPs).

It should be noted that several flagship programmes, cutting across a number of these major areas of concern, have been or will be devised. It is likely that additional support from international sources will be made available so that these flagship programmes can reach those most in need.

The clear interest of the international community in girls’ education, as evident in the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative announced by the United Nations Secretary-General in Dakar, will certainly help to focus national attention on this question. It is also important that other significant sources of disadvantage and disparity in education are identified and that appropriate actions are not only taken but also are integrated into well-defined strategies of intervention. For example, where external assistance is directed towards problems of hunger or malnutrition, school feeding programmes and early childhood/family nutrition schemes should be designed in relation to other interventions, particularly those that target the most vulnerable.
In the years ahead, the full impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in many countries will be nothing short of calamitous. Its easiest victims will be those who are already vulnerable due to poverty, ignorance and traditional cultural practices. Among the victims will also be entire education systems and the prospects for achieving EFA targets in coming years. Anticipatory measures need to be identified, selected and implemented urgently in the case of some countries where the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS can be accurately predicted. Over and above these concerns, however, is the increasing realization that the weakening or collapse of education systems will tend to deepen and extend the educational disadvantages of the unreached, the marginalized and the excluded. It is vital for national EFA plans to address these matters realistically, and for international agencies and donors to devise suitable forms of assistance in close consultation with national authorities.

**f) Planning as a participatory process**

Whatever may be the technical expertise and skills that will be required in order to generate and implement a national educational plan, the message from Dakar is clear: such a plan will be more effective if it is grounded upon broad-based partnerships, the participation of stakeholders, transparent and democratic processes, and mechanisms that guarantee greater accountability. The participants in the World Education Forum in Dakar gave a pledge to support the following strategies:

- To ensure the engagement and participation of civil society in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of strategies for educational development; and
- To develop responsive, participatory and accountable systems of educational governance and management.

These approaches, of course, were not invented in Dakar but correspond to experience acquired and lessons learned from many contexts over many years. Similarly, the creation of a national EFA forum as a vehicle for systematic consultation with and representation of national civil society institutions is not entirely new. The importance of the Dakar Framework and, indeed, the whole post-Jomtien process is the widespread recognition that these considerations are not incidental or peripheral but go to the heart of the failure to achieve the goals of EFA. With this recognition comes increased pressure to enact practical measures through which, in due course, visible improvements will emerge. The establishment and effective operation of a national EFA forum, on the lines indicated earlier, will represent a clear sign of improvement at the country level.

**g) The role of the international community**

Statements made before, during and after the Dakar Forum confirm that, in general, the international commitment to support basic education remains strong. Bilateral and multilateral donors have promised to make additional international funding available through grants, loans and material support. On the other hand, the international community has been disappointed by the slowness of improvement and the ineffective use of resources in many countries. This mixture of commitment and concern may be expected to flavour the international response to the immediate task in hand, the preparation of national EFA plans. Governments, meanwhile, have their own concerns about the reliability and sustainability of aid flows, the need for more effective donor co-ordination, the form that new financial resources will take and whether donors can really work with the country rather than promoting their own agendas. For their part, governments are likely to want clear indications...
that increased resources will indeed be forthcoming and will not be blocked by unreasonable conditionalities.

With regard to the preparation of national EFA plans, expressions of international support and types of international assistance may come in several forms, ranging from the concrete and practical to the symbolic and motivational. Examples include:

a) clear messages from headquarters and capitals to country representatives, and then shared with the government and its domestic partners, that there is highest-level support for EFA goals and actions;
b) collaboration with governments and fledgling national EFA forums to help the development of partnerships at country level;
c) advocating and facilitating the inclusion of the EFA agenda in wider frameworks of strategy and planning;
d) renewed efforts to ensure that there is genuine co-ordination, consistency and coherence in the international response to Dakar, particularly among donors; and
e) a range of practical measures, such as the following:

- the designation of a contact person/liaison officer to engage with the national EFA forum and the national-level planning process;
- financial support for the establishment and operation of the forum, including the holding of meetings, the running of working groups and the work of the secretariat;
- expert advice and/or training on policy development and planning approaches and methodologies;
- financial support for the participation of national representatives in workshops (e.g. on planning) at the regional level;
- expert advice and/or financial support regarding the conduct of special studies, the preparation of position papers, analyses, etc.; and
- technical and financial support for publicizing the outcome of the Dakar Forum or other EFA-related activities.

5. Concluding Remarks

Within the perspective that the ultimate goal of the EFA movement is to create a learning society in which all can participate, it is clear that most countries in the world today are experiencing another reality. Nevertheless, the coming years will bring opportunities for many countries to make substantial improvements in basic education that will affect the lives of millions of people. Some of these improvements will be traceable to international support and assistance but most will derive from the efforts of the countries themselves. The following factors will predictably play a key role in this process:

- the development of a shared vision or consensus within a country around the agenda of EFA;
- the cultivation of partnership between government, civil society, the private sector and international agencies;
- country ownership and direction of the EFA project;
- the 'customization' of EFA processes so that they correspond and are adapted to the specific situations and problems of specific countries;
- the allocation of increased resources to the task of achieving EFA goals; and
- the organization of efforts so that those most in need are reached.
Country Guidelines on the Preparation of National EFA Plans of Action has been produced by UNESCO in order to provide an orientation about how the process of follow-up to the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal 26-28 April 2000) may be organized at the country level.

These guidelines focus on the importance of establishing national EFA forums to co-ordinate the task of planning and monitoring progress towards the agreed goals of education for all. In keeping with the Dakar Framework for Action, the guidelines seek to encourage partnership and collaboration between all the actors involved; it is recommended, in particular, that these forums reflect the widest possible representation of all of those who have a vital stake in basic education. It is also recommended that national EFA plans are integrated into existing frameworks of strategy, policy and action at the country level.

Given the enormity of the EFA challenge, it is vital that we work together. To assist the process of building productive partnerships and developing a shared understanding of what is needed, the guidelines seek to answer some basic questions. In addition, some questions are raised that can best be answered at the country level by those dealing actively and directly with the specific challenges facing basic education.