May 23, 2003

MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF EDUCATION FROM SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES

ISLAMABAD DECLARATION ON EFA

Adopted by the Ministerial Meeting on Education for All 21-23 May, 2003, Islamabad - Pakistan

Preamble

Recalling our resolve in Dakar on April 28, 2000, and Katmandu April 12 2001, to create a South Asia EFA Forum,

Acknowledging international development partners’ support in facilitating the activities of the South Asia EFA Forum and consistent efforts to improve the quality of education and mobilize financial resources for Education for All,

We, the Ministers of Education and representatives of government, and non-government organizations from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, attending the Ministerial Meeting of the South Asia EFA Forum in Islamabad on 22 - 23 May, 2003, acknowledge the concerns and imaginative solutions shared by South Asian countries as reflected in the country reports.

We place on record that despite significant diversities among the countries with respect to size, geography, culture, social dynamics, level of economic development, etc, we consciously select the common cross cutting themes of quality improvement, gender parity and resource mobilization, as our most serious challenges to achieve EFA by 2015.

Achievements

In the last three years since Dakar 2000, the region has witnessed notable initiatives in all countries, as indicated by:

- Preparation of the National EFA plans through participation and national consultative processes on strategies and policy development.
- Continuous dialogue with international agencies and bilateral donors for enhanced level of funding for quality education;

- Increased efforts in each country for detailed costing of the Education Plan and its linkage with other national strategies and plans including the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)

- Increased activities to implement continuous assessment systems as a basis for in-country and cross-country comparisons

- Proactive gender sensitive programs in providing quality and resources to girls/female education, including literacy,

- Developing linkages between formal and non-formal systems of education through institutional compatibilities in costing, quality and learning outcomes.

- Building professional partnerships between government, non-government and private sector for sharing resources, knowledge and practices to meet the EFA and Millennium Development Goals.

**Challenges**

We note with concern that South Asia faces many formidable challenges including:

- High level of poverty, illiteracy, inequality and inadequate quality of education

- Inadequate funding for EFA from government and other domestic sources as well as from the international community

- Shortage of trained teachers to facilitate quality learning

- Lack of systematic and regular evidence of learning outcomes shown in terms of standard, competency attainment and what students really learn

- Higher allocations to non-salary budgets made available for quality learning opportunities in classrooms and schools

- Limited use of ICTs as a cost effective learning tool

- Absence of reliable and consistent databases for targeted planning
- Absence of consistent methods for calculating resource requirement projections and their enhancement commensurate with emerging needs and technologies of knowledge-based societies

- Measuring and reflecting private sector and community financial contributions towards EFA goals as reflected in strategies of public-private partnerships

- Engaging more strongly with local level governance and financing for quality outcomes

- Creating enhanced opportunities for regional dialogues on sharing best practices

**Statement**

Taking note of the above achievements as well as challenges and our commitment towards implementation of the Dakar Framework of Action, we recognize that education is the most critical lever for alleviating poverty, empowering people, and to ensure peace, solidarity and prosperity. We therefore, collectively affirm that

**Quality**

**We**

- Commit to provide free, inclusive, gender responsive quality basic education for all including all marginalized and vulnerable groups.

- Commit to improve all aspects of quality of education so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all learners.

- Commit that both quality and access must receive simultaneous attention, and one must not be used as a trade-off against the other

- Shall make all out efforts to scale up programs on quality which have demonstrated promise in outcomes

- Recognize that all key stakeholders in education, notably learners, parents, teachers, community, civil society organizations and government are the most accurate assessors of educational quality.

- Collectively distinguish three aspects of learning outcomes; achievement: what students learn, attainment; the number of students that actually meet the standard by passing exams and acquiring formal qualification; standards: meeting the essential quality outcomes
- Commit to promote principles of tolerance peace and harmony through comprehensive teaching learning process.

- Commit to inter-sectoral linkages in general and support to expansion of ECCE in particular as outlined in National Plans of Action and as a critical link to quality learning at the primary level.

- Will make efforts in ensuring access to ICTs as a cost effective quality learning tool for all students and teachers as we transform towards knowledge-based societies.

**Gender Parity**

**We commit to**

- Ensure that goal 5 of the of the Dakar Framework of Action is explicitly addressed in all EFA plans and state explicitly when and how the 2005 goal will be achieved.

- Develop and implement affirmative action programmes with regard to gender.

- Sensitize partners and stakeholders on gender issues and build their capacity in gender analysis and gender mainstreaming at all levels in all sectors, particularly in the ministries of education to ensure implementation of the goals and strategies.

- Encourage the media to promote broad-based discussions on gender issues and positive role models to counter gender stereotyping.

- Recognize and appreciate the role of NGOs in promoting gender equality at all levels and extend full support including resources to their work.

- Promote adult literacy in general and especially for women in the context of the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012) and in the spirit of Dakar Declaration.

- Develop and implement gender-sensitive programming addressing quality learning needs of girls and women as a priority target group.
Financing

We

- Urge governments to allocate progressively a minimum of 4 percent of GDP to education.

- Remind and urge international agencies and donor community to honour the commitment made in World Education Forum in Dakar for (a) adequate external financing of EFA Goals, (b) better coordinated and more transparent aid to education and (c) ensuring urgent, more extensive and broader debt relief and / or debt cancellation for basic education.

- Impress upon G-8 countries to expedite the finalization of the procedures for Plus- 5 countries and the consequent release of funds against the Fast Track Initiative (FTI), along flexibility to take into account country specific reforms to accelerate progress towards achieving the EFA and Millennium Development Goals in the region.

- Commit to enhance substantially allocation for formal, non-formal education, adult literacy and early childhood care and education (ECCE).

- Recognize the urgency for enhanced and predictable resource mobilization and allocation to education to meet our financing gaps and, in turn, our targets in a timely manner.

- Endorse our commitment to ensure timely disbursals and efficient and transparent utilization of budgetary allocation at all levels.

- Promote local and school based planning and budgeting to ensure community participation and ownership for effective resource utilization.

- Commit to strengthen the information base on the quantum of contributions of household and private sector to EFA.

- Tap domestic resources through public private partnerships for creating an enabling environment in which civil society organizations will undertake access and quality initiatives for EFA.

- Make available adequate financial resources to implement and sustain EFA programs by 2015.
- Undertake to provide reliable and consistent databases, through involvement of all stakeholders* and regular monitoring of progress towards EFA goals and targets including periodic assessments

**Partnerships**

We ensure effective participation of the civil society organizations at all levels in planning, implementation and monitoring goals

**Concluding Statement**

We
- Ensure wider dissemination of this Islamabad Declaration in relevant national and international websites and through print and electronic media and play a proactive role in incorporating and reflecting these decisions into the National Plans of Action for EFA, as well as into all our working documents and activities.

- Acknowledge Pakistan’s pioneering contribution, we further resolve that the South Asian EFA Forum’s Secretariat will move to Dhaka, Bangladesh. The next Inter-Ministerial meeting will be held in 2005 focusing on the theme of decentralization with a focus on implementation of Katmandu Joint Statement and the Islamabad Declaration.

* Communities and Civil Society organizations

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