Asia-Pacific Regional Education Conference (APREC)

Bangkok, Thailand
6-8 August 2014

Statement of Mrs Ann Therese Ndong-Jatta

On “Implementation strategies”

for the Plenary and Sub-regional Group Discussions: Regional Perspectives on the Post-2015 Education Framework for Action
Excellencies, Honorable Ministers of Education and the Assistant Director General Of UNESCO for Education

Dear collaborating Education,

Distinguished country delegates development partners and UN agencies

Representatives of the Civil Society organizations and the private sector

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear UNESCO colleagues,

I am sincerely honoured to be invited to share with you Sub Saharan Africa perspectives on the post-2015 EFA implementation Strategies.

In the past day I listened carefully and learned a lot from your presentations and the discussions I had with some of you. I believe that although journeys to achieve EFA may differ, be more or less challenging and successful, Sub-Saharan African countries and Asian countries alike continue to share the same belief and trust that all human beings should enjoy the right to quality and relevant education. This is a prerequisite for a more peaceful, sustainable and prosperous world and quality living for all. This is the number one message I take from the regional/global consultation meetings I participated in.

The focus of our current session (Session 4) is on Implementation strategies and this is the key question that should drive us all. I will thus focus my statement on what SSA consultations tell us about the priorities and objectives as well as effective implementation strategies on post-2015 agenda (and, If you permit, I will invite you to go back to the Sub Saharan Africa Report that I presented at the Global Education for All Meeting in Oman in May this year if you want more information on the state of EFA in SSA or more details on the various consultations held in the Region).

As far as priorities and objectives for the post-2015 Agenda are concerned, one should keep in mind that the EFA agenda is an unfinished business in general but more so in most of the Sub Saharan African countries. Therefore, although emphasis for the Post-2015 may differ from one country to another, at continental level, countries unanimously agree that both equity and quality - beyond UPE - should receive primary
focus in the post 2015 period. This means that a minimum of 10-12 years of uninterrupted education including 1-3 years preschool should become the benchmark for basic education and one of the criteria for measuring the fulfilment of the right to education.

Besides this common denominator, each of the 5 economic sub regions in SSA, depending on its specific context, has specified additional focus areas or priorities such as Inclusion (this is the case for ECCAS and ECOWAS), Quality Teachers and learning environments (SADC and ECCAS) and skills that translate into employability and entrepreneurship (ECCAS and IGAD).

Before speaking to the three key questions that this session aims to address, I should like to share with you SSA countries perspectives on the EFA framework for Action. For them, the lessons from the past 15 years clearly demonstrate that the EFA internationally agreed goals and associated global efforts as recommended and described in the Dakar Framework for Actions have been critical for awareness-raising and provision of strategic direction to education sector-wide planning and budgeting at country level as well as sustained support of development partners and resource mobilization. SSA countries are also unanimous that the Framework for Action was much useful in monitoring progress as in UPE and adult literacy.

Yet, some countries point to difficulties in acquiring adequate support for sub-sector beyond UPE (e.g. Post-primary or post-basic education) or express concerns about the setting-up of quantified universal goals without adequate consideration of the national context, thereby creating the inability of countries to meet defined targets or, alternatively, resulting in high dependence on external partners.

This last point is a serious drawback of the EFA Framework for Action that we should look at and try to overcome in the next phase. Since Jomtein, in 1990 the realization of EFA goals continue to be a real challenge to reach the lowest quintiles of populations especially in LDCs but also true for more developed countries even though there has been notable progress in general. There are problems in the targeting which must receive serious attention if indeed the agenda is for all and not some. In SSA the major question is not whether progress has been realized but rather how many countries
met all or most of the EFA goals in Africa and if not why? Presently only one small island States the Seychelles and following on its heels, Mauritius could claim to have really come very close to meeting or have met all the 6 EFA goals. There must be something really amiss in the way and manner targets and indicators were set.

Looking at Effective implementation strategies, in the post-2015 some of the key recommendations that emerge from consultations with SSA countries are the following:

First of all, the need to reinforce countries leadership in sector wide policy dialogue, implementation, monitoring and review: The Paris Declaration Principles and Code of Conduct have brought clear progress in this respect but full leadership is still not consistent or assured and this is one of the reasons why the GPE itself has recently reviewed its governance structures to give a more prominent role to beneficiary countries.

There are still too many development agencies coming up with individual agendas or one size fits all programmes which countries have to adhere to if they are to receive earmarked funds. In many of these countries the development partners’ coordination mechanisms and budget support have become a burden on education ministries creating more meetings, more reporting requirements, more demands which in many cases have resulted in gross inefficiencies, a focus on short terms results and discrepancies with the aspirations of the populations.

Some countries in SSA, just like India did, are now refusing funding because of the high transaction cost they generate. The next EFA framework for action should address this issue.

A positive approach which promotes country leadership is the UNESCO Cap/EFA process: Beneficiary countries are identified according to a set of criteria. Available Funding is granted to support institutional and organisational capacity building on a key issue, agreed with countries as well as donors. Countries are then given “carte blanche” to tailor the programme to their own context and needs. UNESCO’s role as external agency is limited to accompanying the formulation of the capacity building programme,
provide expertise if locally available and to facilitate consultation with all stakeholders. This type of approach should be promoted.

Secondly, **Acceleration framework approaches** or what in SSA we referred to as the EFA Big Push approach, developed and used in the past 4 to 5 years for the MDG and the EFA Goals have opened up new grounds on how to tackle education development challenges. The process to develop acceleration plans is innovative in the way it moves beyond traditional policy making or formulation, by focussing on bottleneck analysis and key measures to tackling them. The assumption here is that most countries know the theory and practice of education development, and overall most countries are making progress in education, the key question though is how to mobilize relevant stakeholders consultations to build collective intelligence and solid collaboration and cooperation in meeting the set targets and goals. One has to respond to the slow pace of implementation in SSA. One way to respond better to the pace of progress is States and their Education development partners alike should be encouraged to spend more time on analysing bottlenecks and think outside the box on ways to overcome them.

Sector wide planning is necessary to address sector wide needs but special strategies which bridge the gaps between ministerial silos through multi-disciplinary responses may need to be further discussed and developed to address some specific and challenging issues for education development. UNESCO is more and more promoting a more multi-sectoral responses to countries development needs ie ECCE has to take on a multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholders consultations and joint actions to respond fully to ECD—Education, Health and Social Welfare Ministries working closely with the Finance Ministry.

Acceleration framework approach is also very inspiring because it proposes to build full-fledged advocacy, communication, resource and partnership mobilization as well as monitoring and evaluation strategies around the Education acceleration development strategy itself and this again is a key factor for success.

Thirdly, **Coordination of EFA efforts** have been uneven over the period from the 2000 EFA Forum to date. In most cases it has been very centralized at Global Level. SSA countries have had different mechanisms according to the various sub-regions. Lessons
from the last 5 years is that an efficient coordination of the EFA movement in the SSA region should include national, sub-regional as well as regional levels structures/functions and be fully integrated with RECs which are the main regional integration mechanisms in the region. The example of the SADC region is to be cited here. The countries of the regions all have relatively good record of progress on EFA and have kept the EFA impetus high in the region. With support from UNESCO and other development partners, they have produced each year their own national EFA monitoring report, and hold an annual SADC countries EFA review meeting. Other RECs have been less systematic. With this coordination process, SADC countries have been able to join efforts and funding or exchange experience to better address some of their common challenges e.g. on HIV and Aids education, on ECCE and TVET.

A fourth recommendation relates to some of the key factors of education quality which have not received sufficient attention and support. These issues are language of instruction, cultural relevance of curriculum and education governance including school level leadership. It is now widely recognized that teacher training is a prerequisite but there remains resistance to accompany and support countries which have taken steps to adapt the language of instruction or revised their curriculum to make it more culturally relevant. Resistance may emerge from the knowledge that these are long term processes or there may be a lack of expertise but this is a central dimension of quality education. Quality must not focus too much on assessment of learning outcomes but much take on a comprehensive approach to addressing curriculum content bearing in mind emerging issues like ESD and citizenship education coupled with sufficient attention on the purpose of education as articulated in the four pillars of education of the Delor's report. Quality cannot be addressed without giving prominence to Teacher professional development and school governance and school leadership which has not been sufficiently developed in most SSA countries and is a major impediment to quality teaching and learning. Dakar Framework for action promoted decentralization/devolution, the post 2015 should go beyond, to look at school level effectiveness issues and how trained teachers can be assessed and supported to provide quality/effective teaching, efficient school level governance, in-service and continuing training and retraining to overcome overwhelming perennial problems of limited supply, stock and quality of teachers—shortage, under qualified or unqualified teachers
as well as addressed more efficiently the question of learning and the creation of autonomous learners and peer learning. The latter would transform teaching into a task of facilitating learning. Teachers would then become facilitators.

Honorable Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In brief the post 2015 framework of action must deepened the implementation of the present EFA strategies and monitor its implementation. There should be the enforcement of the implementation of the Paris declaration conclusions for country leadership in development assistance and strengthen joint planning, monitoring and evaluation of implementation strategies. Financing as a strategy is key but countries must not be made to be too dependent on external donor financing. Member states take the lead in allocation of adequate financial and material resources to education and seek innovative financing mechanisms with non-traditional in-country partners most of whom would need to rise up to their social cooperate responsibilities. In addition governments would need to also ensure through its governance mechanism ensure good monitoring if its internal and external efficiencies in public expenditure and periodic reviews of its spending patterns to curb waste and inappropriate use of public resources.

At the sub-regional and regional levels of SSA, similar measures would be required in increasing resources for education and human resource development with effective coordination, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. External donor financing could only make sense if its mobilization and use is well coordinated and put into good use.

I thank you for your kind attention