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Statement submitted by AVSI Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2011/100.

Statement*

AVSI Foundation, in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 1996, has experience of a few decades in planning and implementing development and emergency programmes in almost 40 countries spanning sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and South-East Asia, across multiple sectors, in particular education, including technical and vocational training, adult and informal education, and in diverse settings like fragile and conflict and disaster affected areas.

General framework

Access to quality education is not only an essential right of every child and adult as recognized in Goal 2 of the Millennium Development Goals: universal access to primary education, but is also widely valued as an essential component of social, economic, and political development of any society. In the recent years the international community and single countries have spent and spend much effort and resources in providing inputs and quantifying progress made or not made in terms of access, enrolment, retention, gender parity and equality in primary education to reach the Millennium Development Goals. Based on our experience in terms of improving the quality of education, augmenting sustainability of interventions and reaching satisfactory learning outcomes, our statement focuses on two points: (a) a vision on education and (b) policy recommendations.

A vision on education

AVSI focuses on infrastructure support, human resources development, educational system strengthening and direct school management with local organizations, and all of this through various long-term commitments, including its sponsorship programme aimed at directly supporting the education of almost 35,000 children.

In 2010 AVSI had almost 1,500 in-country staff, and working relationships and partnerships with about 700 local institutions and civil society organizations, most of which are schools and educational centers. It can attest that achieving change through education is not simply a matter of enrolment rates and size of education budgets, nor is quality of education the automatic sum of many parts including adequate infrastructure, books and learning resources, or teacher trained. In other words, material and financial inputs — measured in terms of budgets and achievement scores in math and language only — are not the only factors for a robust and effective education system. Human factors, namely human and social capital, are key conditions for adequate learning achievements to be made. Education of children necessarily involves parents and families since they have the primary responsibility. Therefore, schools, regardless of the provider, must support the parents and the community.

Quality of education consists in promoting an environment which encourages the development of the unique value and dignity of a person. Only such an educative environment shapes “personalities” where people are aware of the notions of reason and freedom and are able to face challenges not by repeating defined schemes, but

* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.

by expressing their self-awareness and acting in accordance to it with total responsibility and creativity. And this is the first priority to pursue even in the poorest and most fragile areas like, to quote some from our experience, in Haiti, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Southern Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire and in refugee settings.

Policy recommendations

Education as a protection mechanism and who to protect

Many have noted the protective value of education for children vulnerable to a wide range of threats and abuses. This discussion is of particular importance in those fragile and conflict/post-conflict settings around the world and the crucial role of education particularly in these emergency settings cannot be overemphasized. We consider the concept of "protection" as the support for the development of each child's full potential particularly by strengthening the links to family and groups and communities to which he/she belongs and to equip him/her with the reasons and the courage to face the challenges of reality, and not be reduced to the narrow and negative concept of "avoiding or reducing harm" like building around a "protective wall".

Our recommendation

In order to protect and educate children the public and government institutions should "protect" and empower the total educational environments that include families, intermediate groups, schools, local communities.

All quality education providers on board

Many inputs, as mentioned above, run the risk of not being fully exploited because of the poor quality of the education system in a given setting or country. To this end, we would like to emphasize the crucial role played by non-State education institutions, particularly the non-profit ones, which in many cases are the only ones reliable and effective in reaching the most marginalized sectors of the population including those learners with significant obstacles to overcome. These schools are more often close to their communities, enjoy strong parent engagement and commitment, are privy to higher levels of teacher and staff commitment and motivation, and operate more cost effectively. Why in many cases are they overlooked and not considered an essential part of the education system?

A necessary reform is required

State and Government have the duty to ensure education for all, and for this to happen they have to rely on value and fund both State and non-State institutions on the basis of their performance, accountability and compliance with the regulations and the goals set by a state to ensure quality education for all and the fundamental right and freedom of education. We urge Member States and international organizations to take stock from existing and proved effective experience of multi-provider education systems to move forward policies and practices of public and private partnership in the education system to improve synergy and effectiveness. It can also be acknowledged that private schools also face greater variability in terms of access to resources, quality of teaching, and compliance with regulations. Governments and the private sector must work together to improve

synergy while raising the standards for all schools in the system. Innovative systems and processes for accreditation and registration of private schools need to be identified and expanded.

Focus on teachers and their continued professional development

One of the fundamental conditions on which quality in a classroom rests is that teachers are motivated and capable of engaging students, and while teaching any subject matter may favour the building up of openness, awareness and passion for life and reality in the students. Education is more than just the acquisition of knowledge and skills, be they hard or soft ones. When teachers view their role as imparting information, and students view theirs as repeating it back, real learning and personal growth doesn't often take place. The obstacle that stands in the way of improving quality is often related to motivation and commitment, of teachers, and students and parents as well, and the silver bullet to bring about this are not techniques or technology tools. Education happens in a relationship of trust and care, as felt by the teacher when he/she is treated as a person and looks at him/herself as always in the need/track of being educated and supported in his/her professional and personal development, as well as by the student when he/she is valued by the teacher. Rather, passion for the individual and his/her education and an appropriate approach to teacher development are needed to make a difference. Moreover, as stated above, classrooms are only one element of a complete education of a child, to which the family and the community/social life are also responsible. For this reason, quality in education cannot skip the necessary level of parental and community involvement.

Education beyond the primary classroom

While the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All commitments are focused on basic education, and rightly so as a minimum goal, there is growing recognition that learning should start also in early childhood and cannot stop after basic education is completed. Given the complexity of today's world and the reality that large segments of the youth and adult populations around the world have not been able to achieve basic skills, continuing education is an essential service which must become a higher priority for Governments and the international community. Continuing education can take the form of informal schools, technical and vocational training, and adult literacy and numeric programmes.
