

As written



THE HAGUE FORUM

Intervention by

Gustavo López Ospina

Director

Transdisciplinary Project:

“Educating for a Sustainable Future” (EPD)

UNESCO

Netherlands Congress Centre, The Hague
8-12 February 1999

G. Lopez Ospina
Director
“Educating for a Sustainable Future” (EPD)
Tel: 33+(0)1.4568.0868
Fax: 33+(0)1.4568.5635
e-mail: g.lopez@unesco.org

Gustavo Lopez Ospina
UNESCO/EPD
February 1999

THE HAGUE FORUM

Mr Chairman,
Distinguished Members

1. UNESCO is fully committed to the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action and, during the last five years, has been an active member of the United Nations System in trying to achieve its goals.

UNESCO's contribution to the objectives set out in the Programme of Action of the ICPD is in line with the objectives of its Medium-Term Strategy for 1996-2001. Their strategy constitutes not only a baseline for the follow-up to the ICPD, but also a co-ordinated follow-up to the other UN conferences as they pertain to population and development-related issues.

UNESCO is keenly aware of the fact that its action can only be complementary to the various and numerous efforts by Member States, the UN System and NGOs who are trying to solve the problems inherent to the inter-relationship between population and development.

CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

2. **Education: a right and a "tool":** The ICPD Programme of Action (POA) emphasizes the importance of education both as an inalienable human right and as a critical factor in promoting social and demographic change. "Everyone", the POA asserts, "has the right to education, which shall be directed to the full development of human resources and human dignity and potential, with particular attention to women and the girl child...". Education is also identified as a "key factor in sustainable development" and "as a component of well-being and a factor in the development of well-being through its links with demographic, as well as economic and social factors". Education enables individuals to gain access to knowledge, a "precondition" for coping with the complexities of the modern world. Education also shapes an individual's attitudes, expectations and self-image as well as the manner in which he or she is perceived by others. It influences many fundamental aspects of one's life experience: nature of work, place of residence, network or friends and acquaintances, level of aspirations and expectations, etc. Finally, education plays an important role in both the transmission and renewal of cultural values and beliefs, including those relating to family preferences and practices. In all of these

ways, as well as in many others, education exercises an important influence in forming individual attitudes and behaviour and shaping social values and policies that, cumulatively, have a powerful impact on the course of demographic and social change.

3. Historically, the impact of education upon population has been significant, even decisive, with fertility rates declining as educational attainments rise, particularly where the education of women is involved. In the short run, however, the impact of population growth on education systems is dominant. Much of the developing world is still at a phase in the demographic transition in which rapidly growing numbers of students and would-be students severely strain available educational resources. Teachers, facilities, teaching and learning materials, even chalk, paper and pencils, are all in short supply. Thus, if education is to provide the answer to population growth - or, more realistically, an important part of the answer - it will first be necessary to develop education systems capable of bearing the burden of hopes and expectations that are being placed upon them. The ICPD recognized this need and appealed to the governments of developing nations to make greater efforts to achieve quality education for all, and to the international community to demonstrate its solidarity by providing much needed external assistance to countries struggling to educate growing populations.

4. **ICPD objectives:** The ICPD Programme of Action emphasizes the importance of achieving “universal access to quality education, with particular priority being given to primary and technical education and job training, to combat illiteracy and to eliminate gender disparities in access to, retention in and support for, education”. These goals remain far from being achieved. At the mid-term assessment held in Amman, Jordan in 1995 to review progress towards the goals set at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, it was noted that advances had been made in many countries, especially in expanding primary school enrolments. But progress in closing the gender gap - a factor of crucial importance in accelerating the demographic transition - was termed “excruciatingly slow”. Moreover, it was observed that the “expanded vision of basic education espoused in Jomtien [and forcefully reiterated in Cairo] has often been reduced to a simple emphasis on putting more children into school: an essential step, but only one of many measures needed to achieve education for all.” In sum, progress is being achieved, but it is both slow and uneven. If education is expected to come to the rescue of society, by advancing development and accelerating the demographic transition, it is essential that society, first, comes to the rescue of education: providing it with the mission, resources, staff, facilities, equipment and supplies that quality education requires. While the primary responsibility for education rests with national governments, the experience of recent years demonstrates that they cannot shoulder the burden alone. Today we need the active involvement of civil societies and the effective solidarity of the international community.

5. **The demographic challenge to education.** The demographic pressure placed on education systems is evident in the growth of primary school enrolments during the past decades. During the 25-year period 1970-95, for example, total world enrolment at the primary level increased from 396 million to 650 million. This growth was confined exclusively to the developing regions of the world in which enrolment increased from

305 million in 1970 to 561 million in 1995.¹ Even this rapid growth in enrolment, however, could not provide every primary school-age child with a place in school. The number of out-of-school children increased from an estimated 90 million in 1985 to 110 million in 1990, before declining to about 83 million in 1995. Fifty million of these children are girls. Indeed, when the least developed countries are considered alone, the number of out-of-school girls of primary-school age is seen to have increased from an estimated 14 million in 1985 to 19 million in 1995.

The school experience of many children in the developing world is relatively brief and unsatisfactory. Only 66 per cent of primary school-age girls and 72 per cent of boys pursue their studies as far as grade 5. Indeed, many students drop-out between the first and second grade, having acquired not even the most basic elements of an education. High rates of repetition also slow the progress and increase the cost of education in developing countries. This disappointing record no doubt reflects both the poverty of the children concerned and the inability of the school to respond adequately to their needs.

6. **Developing endogenous capacity-building through education and the eradication of illiteracy** – UNESCO is committed to eradicate adult illiteracy and to provide basic education for all, especially by expanding access to girls and women in rural areas. The relationship between education and demography and social changes is one of interdependence. There is a close and complex relationship among education, the reduction of fertility, morbidity and mortality rates.

That is why UNESCO's first educational priority for the last five-year period was the promotion of access for all to every level of education, and to improve the quality, and the relevance, of education.

In 1996, the **International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century** presented its report which gave rise to a great deal of reflection and debate on education throughout the international community. The **Fifth International Conference on Adult Education** (Hamburg, 1997) led to a re-appraisal of the scope and importance of adult education, and identified areas for priority action. The World Conference on Higher Education (Paris, 1998) gave priority place to the discussion on teaching, research, and teacher training on sustainable development and population challenges.

GENDER EQUALITY, EQUITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

7. **Strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedom.** The right to life, liberty and security of the person. UNESCO is actively involved in carrying out actions, at both national and global level, for the protection, observation and further development of human rights. Consolidation of democracy and the elimination of all forms of discrimination, particularly discrimination against women.

Rejecting discrimination, promoting human rights and equality. UNESCO has intensified efforts to help women enjoy equal access with men to education, training and research, to be empowered to participate fully in the economic, political and cultural life of the community.

8. **Advancing gender equality and equity and the empowerment of women.** During the UNESCO General Conference in 1995 “women” became a priority group for all of the Organization’s activities and a special Unit for the promotion of the status of women and gender equality was created.
9. **Increasing knowledge, public awareness, understanding and commitment concerning population, environment and sustainable development issues.** The Trans-disciplinary Project “Educating for a Sustainable Future” was conceived as the tool UNESCO should use to implement this task. This project was envisaged as a major innovation, intended to promote interdisciplinarity and intersectoral work within the Organization and to improve inter-agency co-operation in this field. In the field of population UNESCO, in line with its mandate, has had several achievements at the international level, and has promoted, supported and undertaken relevant activities through its country, regional and inter-regional programmes.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, INCLUDING FAMILY PLANNING AND SEXUAL HEALTH, AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

10. Population education programmes have proven to be a valuable laboratory for testing innovative approaches and practices. They provide a setting for developing and testing methods and materials on a limited scale to see if they achieve their intended objectives. Once effective approaches – and easy-to-use materials incorporating them – have been developed, they can then be integrated into existing curricula and applied on a much wider scale.
11. **Protecting the right of everyone to enjoy physical and mental health, and responding to youth and adolescent needs in reproductive health.** As part of its effort to meet head-on the social and cultural challenges of our time, UNESCO is mobilizing resources against HIV/AIDS and drug abuse, and promoting preventive education as one of the best means of combating them. By targeting decision-makers first, UNESCO hopes to accelerate the pace at which prevention activities are integrated into the national health policies. During the last two biennium, 68 countries (in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Central Asia) elaborated national action plans in the field of preventive education against HIV/AIDS, including drug abuse prevention, through national seminars organized by UNESCO for decision-makers in ministries of education. These seminars created a dynamic effect within the New Delhi and Harare offices which became fully involved in this field in the region. As a follow-up to these seminars, seven Member States (Brazil, Dominican Republic, Honduras, India, Zambia, Zimbabwe) are developing national school curricula, whether in- or out-of-school, with UNESCO’s assistance, mainly through UNAIDS funding.

12. UNESCO's programme of preventive education tries to change the attitudes of young people by giving them the resources they need to deal with these problems. For this purpose, UNESCO produced prototype curriculum and education materials for youth, several posters and two video films. A resource package in three volumes entitled "School Health Education to Prevent AIDS and STD", and intended for curriculum planners and those charged with managing health education in schools, has been translated into more than seven languages and distributed world-wide. UNESCO is also actively contributing to the mobilization of youth through international events and campaigns, such as the international campaign "Force for Change: World AIDS Campaign with Young People", launched by UNAIDS. UNESCO is finally directing its preventive education efforts in the field of HIV/AIDS towards the illiterate and neo-literate women and girls. For example, a Regional Workshop on Preventive Education against HIV/AIDS for Women in Africa was organized in Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) in September 1998 for 17 English- and French-speaking African countries. The workshop was intended for representatives of grassroot women's organizations in order that education messages could be transmitted to their local communities.
13. As the stock of publications, case studies and audio-visual aids has dramatically grown during the last decade, an international data base on education (ISIS) was created within the framework of ASERC (AIDS School Education Resource Centre). A documentation centre and a regional HIV/AIDS/life skills and drugs education database were created in UNESCO's Harare Office.

Alliances and partnerships have been set up with UN sister agencies, such as WHO, and important NGOs such as Education International, in order to follow a common policy and to speak with one voice on some important issues regarding the prevention of HIV/AIDS in schools. UNESCO is also taking part in two main inter-agency working groups: the UNAIDS working group and the ACC sub-Committee on Drugs.

14. Research and proper management of social transformations related to internal migration and urbanization, as well as international migration. UNESCO is mandated to contribute to the development of the social sciences in Member States. In 1994 UNESCO launched a major programme in international social science research called "Management of Social Transformations" (MOST). As a follow-up to Chapter X of the Cairo POA, research, training and regional networking activities have been UNESCO's major vehicles for reinforcing institutional capacity in the social sciences. These networks will constitute centres of expertise to provide information, high-level research and advisory services for policy-makers and other users at the national and international levels on the role of migration and ethno-cultural diversity.

The Asia Pacific Migration Research Network (APMRN) was formed in 1995 to produce research relevant to public policy and to advance education in migration and ethnicity issues.

The *Network on Migration Research in Africa (NOMRA)* launched in June 1998 will focus on the root causes, especially those related to poverty and consequences of diverse

forms of migration, refugee flows and internal displacement of persons in sub-Saharan Africa.

15. Considering the importance of new and diverse forms of migration during the period of post-socialist transformation in Central and Eastern Europe, and the need to provide urgent policy responses, the *Central and Eastern European Network on Migration Research (CEENOM)* was launched during a sub-regional meeting of experts held in Moscow in September 1998.
16. The impact of globalisation on migration trends and prospects for the twenty-first century and the links between the globalisation process, regional integration and migration were analysed in a regional meeting in Santiago, Chile in October 1998. It set the foundations for a *Regional Network on Migration Studies in Latin America and the Caribbean (REMILAC)* in order to strengthen links between research and public policy in this field.
17. **Working for a properly managed relationship between population, resources, the environment and development, and enhancing the full participation of all relevant groups, especially women and YOUTH.** The interaction between population, resources, the environment and development have been of concern to UNESCO for more than 40 years. UNESCO provides scientific input to the inter-governmental process. All educational activities on special youth projects aim to strengthen the role of these major groups in both rural and urban environments.

CONCLUSION

18. UNESCO is strongly committed to continue playing its part with the broadest possible range of partners within and outside the UN System, to implement the ICPD Programme of Action. We await the far-sighted decisions and investments that will maximize our possibilities of doing so. The awareness created by Cairo must now lead to commitment and involvement at all levels, ranging from people at large during their daily lives, through to decision-makers. With the media, parliaments, NGOs, youth associations, the private sector, and all the other actors we can continue to mobilize the conscience of humanity concerning population.

Thank you.
