

Press release

The ministers of education and finance of 23 countries commit to attaining universal primary education by 2015

Bamako, June 22, 2007 – The ministers of education and finance of the 23 countries present at the “International Conference on School Fee Abolition: Planning for Quality and Sustainable Financing” reasserted, on Friday, June 22, their “commitment to attaining the goal of universal primary education by 2015”, in the Bamako Declaration adopted upon completion of their work. They observed, however, that as things now stand, “a considerable number of countries will not reach the targeted goal”, inaccessible “without universal access to the first year of primary school over the next two years”.

The ministers’ commitment is more concretely aimed at “doing whatever is necessary so that no child is kept away from school because his family does not have the financial resources to send him there”, “to increase resources on the national level as well as the effectiveness of their use”, “to establish optimal policies” and to plan activities that can “guarantee the success of the initiative to abolish school fees”.

Recognizing “that our countries, while sharing the same commitment, are on different levels in terms of achieving this objective”, the Declaration’s authors consider that it will be incumbent on each country “to find its own solutions, adapted to its own realities”. Moreover, “aware of the decisive role of civil society in development”, they commit to “working together to mobilize our fellow citizen and to ensure their support”.

They requested “greater support on the part of our financial partners in order to make quality universal education a reality”. In this respect, they urged in particular the International Monetary Fund “on one hand to increase its support and on the other to show more flexibility vis-à-vis the substantial rise in public expenditures for education and, notably for the recruitment of the additional teachers required”. They also asked the G8 countries to honor their 2005 promise to make effective the access of all children “to entirely free and mandatory primary education of good quality” and invited the development partners “to grant funding that is foreseeable, available over the long term and compatible with our national education plans”. Lastly, the ministers committed “to establishing efficient follow-up and monitoring mechanisms in order to ensure that the commitment to reach these objectives leads to concrete results”.

In his closing speech for this conference, which was attended by close to 200 participants, including national delegations from 23 countries as well as experts and decision-makers representing inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, development cooperation agencies, financial institutions and civil society organizations, Mr. Barthélémy Togo the Secretary General of the Ministry of National Education, Mali, stated: “The elimination of school fees is a delicate decision and its application proves to be complex in view of the diversity of situations within our education systems and the budget constraints of our countries.”

He added, “the abolition of school fees must be part of a re-examination of the education system’s financing methods, and should take into account decentralization policies and in particular, the dynamic of economic and social development policies and programs which are geared towards the fight against poverty”.

The recommendations stemming from the Bamako conference, which was organized by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), UNICEF and the World Bank, “must foster a reflection and expert analyses, resulting in concrete strategies and measures, leading to the abolition of school fees, while identifying and controlling risk factors”, Mr. Togo advocated.

Prof. Mamadou Lamine Traoré read a special message from the Malian Minister of National Education, who was unable to attend, in which he congratulated the participants on the quality of the debates and the relevance of the commitments made in favor of the advent of “an African school dedicated to universal and quality education”. He also paid tribute to the Executive Secretary of ADEA, Mamadou Ndoye, “a militant in the daily fight for the cause of African education” and pointed out that Mr. Ndoye agreed to postpone his retirement in order to launch the new ADEA strategic plan and the process of transferring the Association’s headquarters from IIEP/Paris to the African Development Bank’s headquarters in Africa.

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