

ANNEX IX

Summary of the panel's statements during the special meeting on the involvement of civil society in promoting education for all

In his opening address, the Director-General of UNESCO spoke of the various roles and responsibilities of governments and civil society organizations in promoting education for all (see Annex VII). He particularly stressed the new role of civil society organizations as policy partners in education and the need to explore how viable mechanisms for consultation on issues related to EFA could be established or strengthened. While recognizing the diversity of country-specific contexts, the Director-General highlighted the way in which UNESCO would continue to promote actively the process of building partnerships and the overall coordination of EFA.

The Minister of Education of Ghana gave a brief account of recent achievements relating to EFA goals and, in particular, to efforts to: (i) integrate early childhood education, which is private for the most part, into the public sector; (ii) raise the provision of compulsory and free universal primary basic education to 83%, with a positive impact on gender disparity under a special programme that began in 1996; (iii) reduce illiteracy rates to 48%; and (iv) improve quality. The Minister then stressed the importance of civil society in this process and explained how Ghana had moved from recognition of the role of civil society as a provider of innovative and complementary services and as an actor in mobilizing communities to its genuine inclusion as a policy-making partner. He gave examples of viable national and local partnership mechanisms.

The representative of ActionAid Ghana also gave examples of viable partnerships with the government, which had led to the recognition and inclusion of new practices in the provision of alternative services. The representative also referred to the Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition, an unprecedented experience in terms of partnership within civil society.

The Minister of Education of Mozambique referred to the establishment of institutionalized mechanisms for consultation with civil society at the national level to provide inputs into the education policy-making process. He also mentioned the responsibility recently entrusted to a new education department (Department for Community Participation) for suggesting possible mechanisms for partnership and participation at the local level.

The Education Secretary of Nepal also gave an account of achievements in respect of EFA goals. The literacy rate had reached 58% and the enrolment rate 72%. Gender disparities and quality issues continued to be sizeable challenges. The representative stressed his government's recognition of civil society's contribution in the establishment of primary schools and other educational services since the 1950s. The establishment of a favourable policy and environment had facilitated the provision of complementary services by more than 30,000 civil society organizations (CSOs) in the country. The representative said that the time had perhaps come to include civil society in policy making and referred to the newly established EFA Forum and the process of drawing up the national EFA plan of action.

The civil society representative of Nepal's Asia Pacific Partnership laid emphasis on the positive correlation between periods of democratization and the extent of civil society's involvement in education. He regretted, however, that the democratization process had not continued and urged the government to involve civil society systematically, not only as a provider of services but also as a political partner.

The deputy Minister of Education of Yemen stressed the importance of the private schools' role as providers of complementary services in competition with public schools. The Minister gave

some examples of the experience of parents' committees and stressed the importance of electing local civil society teams to enable them to participate in the planning and implementation of the national education strategy formulated after the Dakar Forum.

The civil society representative of the teachers' union in Yemen spoke of the recent development of what he called a "diversified and independent education sector". The 1990 democratization process had encouraged the development of individual initiatives in education. The representative drew attention to the need for legislative frameworks to organize the operation of such private initiatives and called for civil society to be represented in decision-making bodies responsible for formulating education policy.

The Secretary-General of Education International made an analytical response to the various statements and linked them to key issues such as educational funding and the need to ensure quality and equity. He referred to the extraordinary work undertaken by the Global Campaign for Education in raising awareness of the need to enlist public funds to cover the budget shortfall of US \$7 billion, which are indispensable, according to the Campaign, to ensure EFA at the world level by 2015. The representative examined the dangers of unbridled privatization to the detriment of free education and the harmful effects of the large-scale employment of too many voluntary teachers on the quality of education. The Secretary-General laid emphasis, in particular, on the importance of the government's responsibility for the overall coordination of EFA efforts at the national level and on the improvement of the status and working conditions of teachers with a view to providing free and compulsory quality education for all.