

# **Executive Summary of The Japan Education Forum VIII (JEF-VIII)**

## **- Collaboration Toward Self-Reliant Educational Development -**

Japan, in agreement with the international community, including both developed and developing nations, acknowledge that universalizing quality education is of paramount importance. In September of 2010, at the UN summit on the Millennium Development Goals, Japan launched its new education cooperation policy, committing itself to educational cooperation as a key component for realizing human security in terms of human rights, sustainable development and world peace. The Japan Education Forum (JEF), an annual international forum was established in March 2004, facilitating collaboration between government and academic sectors as part of Japan's educational cooperation. The purpose of this forum is to promote the open and frank exchange of opinions and ideas among a range of stakeholders. The forum is jointly organized by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Hiroshima University and Tsukuba University. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) provided support for this year's forum.

This year's 8<sup>th</sup> edition of JEF took place at the National Center of Science Building in Tokyo on Feb. 3, 2011. Its theme was "Educational Improvement and Roles of Local Community" and focused on creating a dialogue on the ways in which self-motivated community involvement plays a crucial role in the improvement of school education. The morning session featured two keynote speeches. The first keynote speech was given by linguistic researcher, Professor Abou Diarra, who currently holds a post as the Chief of Education Decentralization/Deconcentration Bureau in Mali's Ministry of Education, Literacy and National Languages. His speech was followed by the second keynote speech, given by Professor Ikuyo Kaneko, Professor at the Graduate School of Media and Governance, and Faculty of Policy Management at Keio University. The afternoon session consisted of a panel discussion, which concentrated on the theme, "School Improvement and the Roles of Local Community". Following the panel discussion, this year's forum was concluded by open floor discussions, and a question and answer session in which attendees from more than ten countries fielded questions and comments. In total more than 110 participants attended this forum including diplomats, development cooperation agency representatives, university faculty members, NGO/NPO's, local school and community members and the general public.

### **Keynote Speech by Professor Abou Diarra, Chief of Education Decentralization/Deconcentration Bureau, Ministry of Education, Literacy and National Languages, Mali**

Professor Diarra's speech was entitled "The Development of Educational Systems and the Participation of Base-Level Communities: The Mali Case" in which he argued that in Africa, the centralized organization and education systems, which were born out of colonial rule are no longer adequate in meeting the needs of quality universal education. Instead, school management competencies and responsibilities should be transferred to local schools and/or authorities, who are in closer proximity to the main beneficiaries of educational services and can take into account the needs and concerns of those constituents. Thus, the decentralization of education is an important key in reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the field of education. Community schools were adopted in Mali in 1990. These schools are run by School Management Committees (CGS) which are managed by the Mali government's "School Management Committees Support Project" (PACGS) in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). PACGS outlined three main approaches to make the CGS functional: democratic elections of CGS members, school management technical training of CGS members and the establishment of a sustainable CGS monitoring and supervising system. Thus far, 456 schools have been targets of this project and Mali intends to expand that number to

1,000 next year. Professor Diarra firmly believes that communities, with the help of partners at all levels can support effective school management.

### **Keynote Speech by Professor Ikuyo Kaneko, Graduate School of Media and Governance, and Faculty of Policy Management, Keio University**

In his keynote speech titled, “Contributions of Local Communities to Realize Better Education: A View from Japanese Educational Policies”, Professor Kaneko provided us with an engaging presentation on some of Japan’s current educational policies, and presented a documentary filmed at Nishi-Mitaka School to illustrate the ways in which these policies are being implemented on the ground. He began with outlining some problems Japan as a country faces such as a decreasing population, economic polarization of Japanese society and the increase of disadvantaged Japanese youth. Though Japan is often credited with providing good education for all children in all areas of the country, Professor Kaneko contends that the top-down approach and hierarchical nature of the Japanese public school system is not adequate in the context of the present. A Japanese law was enacted in 2004, which allows boards of education to establish community schools, which are governed by a community school council. These community schools allow for parents, local residents and local teachers to share authority in administrative decisions as well as participating in day-to-day school activities. The documentary shown during the keynote speech highlighted the ways in which the community school approach supports the students and community as well as makes the school’s administration more transparent.

At the conclusion of both keynote speeches, a question and answer session moderated by Professor Kazuhiro Yoshida, Center for the Study of International Cooperation in Education, Hiroshima University, was held. Questions were fielded from audience participants from Malawi, Cameroon, Morocco, Angola, Albania and Japan. Topics included how to evaluate educational quality, how to ensure quality community participation, how to adapt community participation to a pre-school context, sustainability and the competencies acquired by Japanese students as a result of community participation.

### **Panel Session**

A panel session was held in the afternoon and the theme was “School Improvement and Roles of Local Community”. Dr. Waraiporn Sangnapaboworn, Head of International Education Section, Office of National Education Commission, Thailand served as a presenter and was also the moderator for this session. Experts in issues dealing with the decentralization of education in developing countries from India, Niger, the United States and Japan were called upon to participate as panelists.

Dr. Waraiporn began the session with a presentation centered upon Thailand’s 1999 National Education Act, which aims at facilitating the collaboration of what she termed, “The Three Pillars of Thai Society”: the home, school and temple. Through the decentralization of power in the education sector, these three entities have been placed with greater authority in local schools through the formation of a school council, which supervises and supports the management of each school. In her presentation, she outlined the stages of progress of the act from its inception to the present. Though the roles of each of the three entities were somewhat unclear in the beginning, it has evolved into a successful collaboration.

The second panelist of the day was Professor Gerald W. Fry, Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development, College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota. Professor Fry’s presentation focused on the rural northeast area of Thailand, which has historically “lagged behind” other regions. Fry contends that government reforms in education should be guided by the following five principles: fiscal neutrality, equity, equality,

empowerment and putting the last first. These can be promoted through the decentralization of education and increased community involvement. However, there must be genuine commitment from the government to both empowerment and equity for these goals to be achieved. Namely, Professor Fry contends that *compensatory* distribution of resources should be given to disadvantaged communities.

Next, Professor R. Govinda, Vice chancellor of the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA), New Delhi, presented some critical issues in community participation and school improvement in India. The involvement of the community in school management stems from three rationales: democracy rationale, social justice and equity rationale, and economic rationalism and free market principle. Community participation can help to facilitate improved enrollment, improved infrastructure and facilities, additional supplementary resources, oversight of development projects and improved social watch. In terms of student enrollment, Professor Govinda contends that community oversight is extremely important as only those who can see the reasons for student dropout firsthand can help solve the problems on the ground. He concluded by stating the need to bring the potential diverse range of community participants onto a common platform, and the need for all parties, from the government down to be ready for a long term consistent engagement.

Mr. Ibo Issa, National Coordinator, NGO ONEN and Principal Coordinator, JICA/EPT Project introduced the experience of Niger's educational development through community participation. The presentation gave a pragmatic analysis of the achievements of school management committees in Niger known as COGES. With assistance from JICA via its "School for All" project (EPT), the COGES scheme in Niger was transformed from an ineffective policy to one which has achieved tangible success. Its success was due in part to three key components: democratic elections of its committee members, integrated monitoring system and 'school action plans'. This approach has gained the attention of neighboring countries, Mali, Burkina Faso and Senegal, which have sent delegations to Niger in order to implement this strategy in their own countries. Through continued development of this policy, Niger's Ministry of National Education seeks to further improve the quality of education in the areas of study hours, learning environment and the quality of teaching/learning.

The final presentation of the session was made by Professor Noriaki Mizumoto, Associate Professor at the College of Education, School of Human Sciences, University of Tsukuba in which he discussed the role of community in schools in the case of Japan. Professor Mizumoto contends that although the community has historically had close ties and played a major role in Japanese schools, the changing climate of education from local as well as global perspectives has caused Japan to reevaluate the role of the local community in schools. Due to recent government policies to decentralize education, local schools have been required to deal with complicated issues on their own initiative. Thus, schools must rely on the local community for human resources, extracurricular opportunities and improved safety measures. In the context of Japan, collaboration between the school and community must be promoted through activities to support children rather than school governance as many of Japan's local constituents are not interested in school governance, but rather student activities. Finally, to better manage schools, stakeholders must be able to design venues for collaboration, facilitate active communication, organize discussion and make democratic decisions in order to improve schools in the future.

An open floor question and answer session with the panelists took place following Professor Mizumoto's presentation and was moderated by Dr. Waraiporn and Professor Mizumoto. Following a brief recap of each presenter by Dr. Waraiporn, the floor was open to participants of JEF in which questions and comments were fielded from participants from Indonesia, Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, and Japan. Participants addressed topics such as the economic importance of decentralization, difficulties in facilitating cooperation in multicultural communities, long-term sustainability of local projects, and the degree to which the community should get involved.

Finally, Professor Kazuhiro Yoshida, Hiroshima University, moderated the concluding discussion in which he invited each panelist and keynote speaker to briefly add any additional comments to the discussion. Following their comments, Professor Yoshida stressed that regardless of the country or community, the mutual relationship between the community and school is not only a classic issue but also an important current issue. This forum provided a good opportunity to address various issues related to this topic. With that, JEF VIII was concluded.