

Preface

Today hundreds of millions of children and adults, especially girls and women, are struggling for survival in destitution and distress. They are victims of war, violence, poverty and abuse. They are refugees, handicapped, marginalised, abandoned, street and working children, unemployed, forgotten. They are at risk of murder, torture, rape, sexual exploitation, drugs, HIV-AIDS, hunger, and forced labour. Most have never been to school or dropped out early due to poverty or discrimination. Education is their only way out.

This book is about the power of education: the kind of education that simultaneously enhances the quality of life for both individuals and the wider society. It is the story of how education enriches the lives of individuals, communities and nations. It seeks to explain why education must be protected as a basic human right, as a value in and of itself. The ultimate goal of education is to equip all people, regardless of gender, age or circumstances with the knowledge, skills and values necessary to develop their talents and for them to participate fully in the life and work of their society. To realise its potential, education must be of high quality, accessible to all, and emancipatory – it must open minds and doors. An empowering education is one that builds the human resources that we need to be productive, to continue to learn, to solve problems, to be creative, and to live together and with nature in peace and harmony. When nations ensure that such an education is accessible to all throughout their lives, a quiet revolution is set in motion: education becomes the engine of sustainable development (economic, social, moral, intellectual and cultural) and the key to a better world.

The 1990s were an important period in world history. The decade leading to the year 2000 brought about significant political changes worldwide as nation after nation moved towards democracy. It was also the decade of great intellectual, economic, scientific and technological change (in particular, in the development of new information and communication technologies) in what became known as the global knowledge society. The symbolic year 2000 stimulated many people, institutions and governments to reflect on the challenges of the twenty-first century. The focus of this book is on the role played by the international community, and particularly by UNESCO, in supporting the quiet revolution that gathered momentum during the

1990s. It is a story about an impossible dream, a necessary utopia: about the struggle against oppression, indifference to the plight of the poor, and the ruthless exploitation of our planet's natural and human resources. It is also about the need for international intellectual and moral solidarity, for only by sharing knowledge, research, innovation and experience and working together can we hope to find solutions to the challenges facing our world.

Ensuring that all children, youth and adults have access to quality education has always been central to the mission of UNESCO. This book gives an account of the role played by UNESCO since 1989 in the Education for All (EFA) movement. It is also about the ways in which education is transforming our world, while at the same time being transformed by the forces of globalisation. An account is given of the thinking behind UNESCO's International Commission on Education for the twenty-first century and the emphasis given to lifelong learning. It tells of the challenges facing secondary, technical and higher education, as well as the arts, humanities, science, health and environmental education. It also considers the role that education plays in building new nations, and UNESCO's role in reconstructing education systems in the aftermath of violent conflicts and natural disasters – education for democracy, peace, human rights and sustainable development.

At the World Summit on Development in 2000, world leaders committed their nations to take urgent action to deal with some of the most serious problems facing humanity, and to work towards a set of agreed goals (the Millennium Development Goals). Subsequent chapters of this book deal with the contribution that education can make to the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, to gender equity, to the protection of the world's rich cultural and natural heritage, and to facing the challenges posed by globalisation and the internationalisation of education, advances in communication technology, global warming and climate change. In the concluding chapters, an insider's view is also given of how international organisations work, their strengths and weaknesses, and the reforms needed if UNESCO is to preserve, while renewing, the vision of the world leaders who founded the organisation.

In all international organisations, one finds bureaucrats, political appointees and dedicated professional and support staff. It is to the latter, my hard-working and talented colleagues who share the values embodied in the constitution of UNESCO, that this book is dedicated. I must also include in that dedication, the scholars, teachers, literacy workers and young people who have been UNESCO's partners in its efforts to empower others through education. Let me also add that whatever UNESCO has achieved has been very much a team effort. I must pay a special tribute to all the professionals and support staff that formed the UNESCO team in Paris, its Institutes, Centres and field offices throughout the world. I cannot mention all by name, but I would be remiss if I did not express my gratitude to Federico Mayor (Director-General of UNESCO, 1988–1999) for his leadership and support. Special mention should be made of Wolf Rissom and Sheila Haggis who served as Executive Directors in the Office of the Assistant Director-General for Education. They were always there when work had to be completed and the going was tough. In writing

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