

Summary NGO Forum – 26 April 2005

The NGO Forum of 26 April 2005, was held at LINS, Oslo University College, Norway, Pilestredet 52. Unlike other forums, this one has two parts. In the first part, which was the main part of the meeting, the theme was **‘WTO and Education – Issues, Challenges and Opportunities’**. Here, the key speaker was Helene Bank from IGNIS – *Institutt for globalt nettverksarbeid, informasjon og studier*. Helene’s presentation, which was very well received by the participants (about 26 people-the list of participants attached), started with a brief historical background of the formation of WTO and then proceeded to outline the rationale that inspired the neo-liberal thinking that guides WTO’s operations. Here, the thrust of Helene’s presentation was to show the impact of WTO’s neo-liberal agenda on the trade in services, especially its effects to education both here in Norway and also in developing countries. She also revealed the active role played by the Norwegian Government not only in binding Norway to the WTO’s regime, but also in spearheading and pushing developing countries into signing the WTO’s agreement on trade in services which imply total liberalisation of Higher Education. She has very convincingly shown that this is being done despite the fact that developing countries themselves have actually said they do not want to liberalise their higher education and indeed, asked Norway to stop pushing them towards that direction. The dialogue that has been going on for sometime now between Norway and South Africa on Higher Education was specifically mentioned as a case where Norway is still pushing South Africa to liberalise its Higher Education despite the fact that South Africa has openly said that they do not want to do that. As the discussion unfold, it became clearer that many participants were not aware of the “power politics” which really inform the decision making process in WTO. Many people were amazed by the ‘undemocratic’ ways in which the Norwegian Government has bought into the neo-liberal thinking of WTO and has bound the country into liberalisation of education without any serious debate and the way the Norwegian Government is treating developing countries in this issue.

In the second part of the forum the theme was **‘Literacy work of the Norwegian NGOs’** and Bente Nilson, Head of Education Section in NORAD and Professor Anders Breidlid, LINS, Oslo University College informed the participants about this up-coming assignment to be undertaken by LINS on the request from NORAD in a near future. The NGO forum concluded by proposing following possible themes for the next NGO forum:

1. Promising practices on literacy work of Norwegian NGOs
2. Utdanningsforbundet
3. Early childhood education
4. Education Financing

Next NGO forum will be:

Date: Tuesday – 1st June 2005

Theme: Early Childhood Education

Key Speaker: Professor Jan-Erik Johansson, FLU(Preschool Teacher Education), Oslo University College.

NGO Forum at HiO April 26, 2005

Participants:

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