

DAY 4, 2016 WSF in Montreal by Denis Kalekeni, General Secretary, Teachers union of Malawi

Hallo Everyone! I am quite happy to be part of the team attending the 2016 WSF in Montreal Canada coming as a partner of Action Aid and attending such an event for the very first time. I have been working with a wonderful team that I have ever encountered comprising: Victorine, Amade, Julie and Andrew.



Day 4 of the WSF broke out with its own surprise. Chilly, cloudy and rainy, the team braved the weather and walked about two kilometers from Delta Hotel to the venue of events, Université du Québec à Montréal.

Reaching there, the team split into three groups. Victorine and Andrew joined later by ActionAid Vietnam country director and board member, manned the AA stand convincing people to listen and sensitizing them on the AA campaign on Tax and Education and also taking photos for sharing on social media while distributing various campaign materials. Despite the fact that a good number of people had already been approached in the past three days, the two colleagues never got depressed in ensuring

that as many people as they could afford, were reached out.

The second group comprised of Amade and Julie. The two attended three sessions, one on ***“Inequality”*** organized by AA and Oxfam which aimed at showing different dimensions of inequality and strategies to address them from the local and international perspective. The other was on ***“Beautiful Rising”*** which was all about sharing strategies and techniques for innovative campaign. This is a diversion from the normal and routine campaigns and innovating different funny ways. For instance, if the campaign is about grading of a football pitch in an area where there isn't one, the campaigners would just erect temporary goal posts on a public area, say a car park, and start playing football there. This would be enough message to the authorities that there is need for grading of a football ground. At 12.00 noon, Amade and Julie participated in the protest match at the Government Buildings against the denial of visas to some would-be participants from Gambia, Zambia, Senegal, Palestine and Mozambique. The names of the countries were actually written on the floors of the Government Buildings.



I attended the session on ***“Response to the Privatization/Commodification of Education Knowledge”*** where I was



joined by Victorine. The presenters zeroed in on the fact that there is a decrease in the funding of public schools which leads to dwindling standards of education and in the process, those offering commercialized education take advantage. Angelo Gavrielatos of Education International, who was one of the presenters concluded by saying: “The greatest threat to quality public education which should be free and universally accessible is privatization and commercialization of Education.” Victorine asked a very powerful question to the panel of teachers’ union’s leaders “in the wake of all these challenges, what would be the role of the Teacher Unions in addressing this new trend of privatization, given that teachers are found at every corner of a particular country, even in the remotest

village?” Unfortunately, there were no concrete answer to that question but this is certainly where the issue of strategic partnership between Teacher Unions and NGOs comes in with capacity building of the union leadership at center stage. It is pleasing to note that Action Aid has already taken a leading role in this area.

From there, Victorine went back to the AA stand and I proceeded to attend another session on ***“Education in conflict situations”*** where Rafat Sabbah from the Teacher Creativity Centre of Palestine made a presentation through skype as he was denied visa to Canada. He provided a very distressing picture of how education suffers in war-torn countries like

Palestine where apart from bombing the school infrastructure, school blocks also become targets of military camps paralyzing the whole education system.

The last session of the day, which was attended by the entire team, was a Convergence Assembly on **“The Right to Education”** and it was jam packed. The Assembly centred on uniting collectives, unions and citizens defending a humanist vision of education that is accessible to everyone; denouncing the attacks on academic liberty and the freedoms of expression of teachers, researchers and students; condemning the many faces of privatization, marketization and the “client” approach to education systems as well as providing space for deliberation and discussion on strategies to adopt and promote an education system that is open, liberating and free from discrimination and injustice, in this time of market globalization and government submission to market forces.



Action Aid team took advantage of this convergence assembly to highlight the alarming huge amounts of resources governments are losing due to provision of tax holidays to multinational companies, which if collected would have been directed towards financing the education system thereby creating an enabling environment for learners particularly the girl child.



AA team implored all participants globally, to join in the campaign of calling upon multinational companies to pay their share of the fair tax as a means of circumventing underfunding towards education, all to a loud applause of the entire assembly.

Noting that events on the following day would be at AGORA space, the team retired from the hectic day by taking group and individual pictures on the AA stand and dismounting the stand, carrying all the remaining materials back to Delta Hotel, also braving the same hostile weather up to the point of forcing the team to seek refuge in Complex Desjardins where coincidentally, I had a chance of buying reading glasses from the shop at only 2 dollars since I had forgotten mine in China last month.

What a double win!
And here I drop now.

VIVA WSF 2016!

Viva ActionAid!

Viva Teachers Union of Malawi!

Montreal, 12th August 2016.