This issue begins with an article by Peter Smith, UNESCO’s Assistant Director-General for Education. It is an honour and a pleasure for Prospects to welcome him to its pages for the first time in this way. Peter Smith recalls here UNESCO’s mission on the theme of Education for All (EFA) and the opportunity for the Organization to strengthen and broaden its commitment through a revised Action Plan focused on a limited number of key themes. Beyond the grand architectural plan of the actions to be undertaken and the building blocks that will make up its operations, the reader will have no trouble appreciating the personal conviction, the strategic vision, the force of the commitment and the enthusiasm of a man who intends to take resolute action so that the objective of EFA by 2015 does not remain merely an illusion or a catchphrase. On this subject, the metaphor of constructing a building seems to us both profitable and meaningful: first, we are dealing with an enormous BUILDING SITE and, secondly, it is only by harnessing ALL THE NECESSARY TRADES, each in its own way, that our edifice can be constructed on solid and permanent foundations. In our opinion, the "creative utopia" of Education FOR All will only become a reality if it is based on Education BY All.

On this same line of thought, the study that ends this issue, written by Faryal Khan, provides an interesting picture full of useful information. Through examples of more than thirty "school councils" drawn from developing countries in various parts of the world, we can obtain a clear view of both the benefits of real participation by the community in education and the difficulties associated with it. Much remains to be achieved, especially in establishing an equitable balance between males and females, as well as the inclusion of people from disadvantaged socio-economic classes on school councils, if we really want them to play the role of true partners in sharing responsibility, participation and democratic procedures.

The Open File in this issue is entirely devoted to the presentation of the first series of five actual experiences using policy dialogue in different areas and at different levels, both in French-speaking Africa and also in Portugal. Prospects had previously devoted its issue number 130 (vol. xxxiv, no. 2, June 2004) to policy dialogue. As we noted at that time: "Taking policy dialogue into account as a central and determining element in the construction and development of educational policies may be considered as one of the major trends typical of the world’s education systems today" (Luisoni, 2004). Indeed, nowhere is it either reasonable or possible to "govern by decree", particularly since nobody has any doubt about

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the statement: "education is everybody’s business". The Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, stated in 2004 just before the 47th session of the International Conference on Education his "conviction that good governance and national and international policy dialogue are vital for achieving quality education. In addition to focusing on the internal life of institutions, it is also necessary to take account of the "enabling environment" of policy-making, consensus-building and partnership which creates the conditions for increased quality to occur. Policy dialogue, informed by the findings of research and the contributions of professional expertise, is the medium through which the contours of the possible and the desirable are aligned" (Matsuura, 2004). We are well aware that bridging the gap between the desirable and the possible is a long and difficult undertaking. However, there are numerous examples throughout the world demonstrating the fact that, when we succeed in uniting the synergy of KNOWLEDGE, WILL and POWER, it is possible to construct new and more democratic ways of managing the school.

These short monographs/case studies were originally intended to serve as working instruments during the inter-training seminars on policy dialogue organized by UNESCO’s International Bureau of Education (IBE) from 2003 onwards in French-speaking Africa, in partnership with the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA). We believe that they would be of interest to the whole global educational community. Through the examples of building a vision for education in Benin, the preparation and adoption of an education charter in Portugal, the process of developing and implementing the 10-year educational development programme in Mali, the introduction of a master plan in Mauritius or the basic education awareness campaign in Niger which brought together the major partners in the education system at various levels – these are all ways of thinking and acting in different ways that are coming to the fore and assuming their place. The experiences presented here show in particular and for various reasons the importance of a guiding vision, of the need for political stability and of commitment from the entire government, of the benefits of democratic debate, the utility of involving all the social partners who might devote greater attention to education, as well as the critical role of information and communication in the conduct of educational policies. All of these experiences are directed towards one ultimate objective: better quality education and, even if there is no shortage of problems and the short-term outcomes appear somewhat limited, profound changes have been set in motion because they affect the way people think.

Not one of these experiences can be considered as a "model" and the authors carry out their analysis with lucidity and a critical attitude. In this context, the "lessons learned" will be of particular interest to our readers. Varied and written by the people directly involved, these (good) practices witness real-life situations that took place at a particular time, in a particular place in a particular country. However, beyond diversity, they all bear witness to a strong vision, to an actual will and commitment in favour of policy dialogue for the better management of education. It is in this way that they can, we hope,