



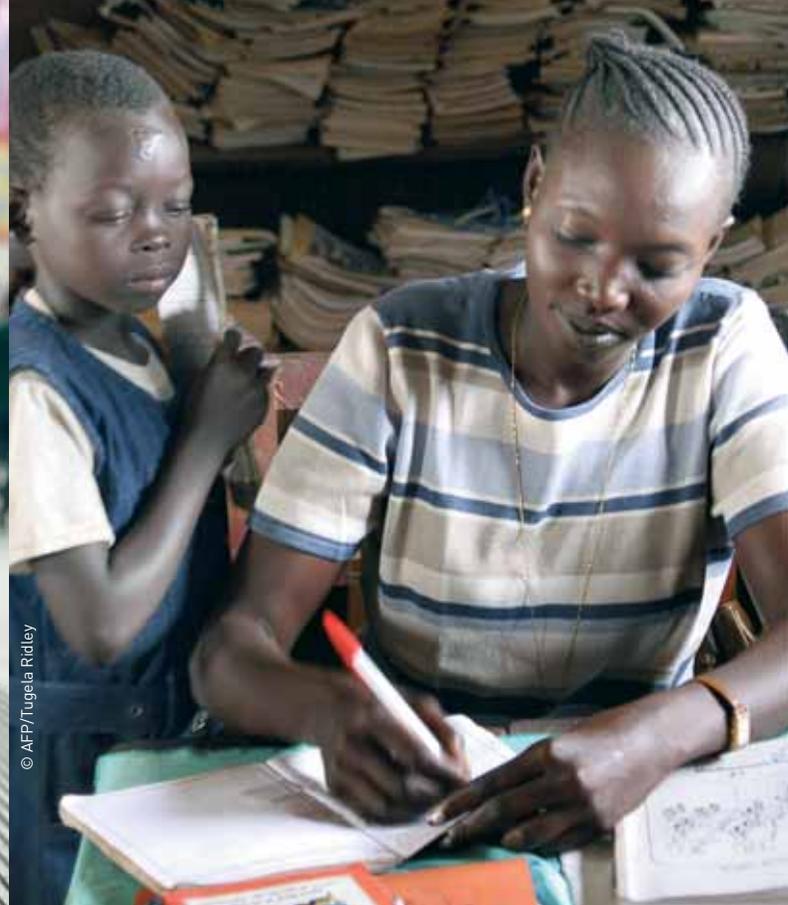
© CARO PHOTO/SIPA



© Mikkel ØSTERGAARD / PANOS / EDITINGSERVER.COM



© Zhang xinyu/IMAGINECHINA/MAXPPP / REUTERS



© AFP/Tugela Ridley

PART I. A comprehensive approach

Chapter 1

Learning begins at birth

The child's early experiences, the special focus of this year's *EFA Global Monitoring Report*, create the base for all subsequent learning. Strong early childhood foundations – including good health, nutrition and a nurturing environment – can help ensure a smooth transition to primary school, a better chance of completing basic education, and a route out of poverty and disadvantage. It is therefore no coincidence that the first EFA goal calls on countries to expand and improve early childhood care and education (ECCE), especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. ECCE is an instrument to guarantee children's rights, opens the way to all the EFA goals and contributes powerfully to reducing poverty, the overarching objective of the Millennium Development Goals. It is high time to move ECCE up the policy agenda, in line with the comprehensive view of EFA as conceived in Dakar.

Children's experiences in the first years create the foundation for subsequent learning

Learning begins at birth

Learning begins before a child walks through the classroom door. From the earliest age, children's development and learning are fostered through their interactions with caring human beings in secure, nurturing and stimulating environments. Young children's experiences in the first years of life – well before they begin school – create the foundation for subsequent learning. Although early childhood is a period of great potential for human growth and development, it is also a time when children are especially fragile and vulnerable.

Today, despite considerable progress, the status of young children remains disturbing, particularly in the poorest countries. A child born in the developing world has a four out of ten chance of living in extreme poverty, defined as living on less than US\$1 a day. An estimated 10.5 million children died in 2005 before they reached age 5, most from preventable diseases and in countries that have experienced major armed conflict since 1999. AIDS has orphaned more than 15 million children under age 18, 80% of them in sub-Saharan Africa. The rights of millions of children are violated by trafficking, labour, abuse and neglect. Finally, many of the 50 million children whose births are not registered each year are unable to access basic services or schooling as a result (UNICEF, 2005b).

For all these reasons early intervention is crucial: it is far more challenging and costly to compensate for educational and social disadvantage among older children and adults than it is to provide preventive measures and support in early childhood. Good-quality early childhood care and education programmes – including immunization, parenting education, home-based activities and kindergartens, pre-schools or nurseries – provide health, nutrition, hygiene, stimulation and social interaction that support children's development and learning. Participation of young children in such programmes can lead to a more equitable society.

This edition of the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* recognizes the significance of the early years of children's lives in shaping the quality of their childhoods as well as their future education, health and economic welfare. In addition to its core function of monitoring and analysing progress on all six Education for All (EFA) goals (Box 1.1), this Report highlights the need for (a) a comprehensive approach (working

toward all six goals and taking a broad view of early childhood care and education); (b) special attention to issues of equity and inclusion; and (c) urgent action in order to achieve all the EFA goals on time.

Comprehensiveness, equity and action

The EFA goals were conceived as an indivisible whole, addressing the rights of *all* children, youth and adults. Thus, the educational needs of populations in situations of conflict and crisis, or people who are marginalized through language, disability, poverty or culture, deserve special attention. The goals further call for *quality* in education for everyone, as a prerequisite for the acquisition of sustainable skills, knowledge and attitudes that enhance human capabilities and counter poverty and inequality.

In this way the EFA goals contribute directly to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially the overarching goal of eradicating poverty (Box 1.1). The EFA goals are also more ambitious than the MDGs. Cautiously phrased, the two education MDGs omit mention of 'free and compulsory' aspects of primary schooling and are restricted to seeking the elimination of gender disparities in education rather than to achieving the more ambitious gender equality espoused by the Dakar Framework. Further, literacy (EFA goal 4), early childhood care and education (EFA goal 1) and youth and adult learning needs (EFA goal 3) are not mentioned. This Report, like all its predecessors, reflects the conviction that a comprehensive approach is needed, encompassing all the EFA goals – a view also stressed at the 2005 World Summit, the 2005 EFA High-Level Group Meeting and the 2006 G8 Summit.

The EFA goals were set in 2000 with a target date of 2015. This is the fifth Report monitoring general progress and addressing a special theme: this year the theme is early childhood care and education (ECCE), the subject of the first EFA goal. Previous Reports have featured gender (2003/4), quality (2005) and adult literacy (2006). The next Report, in 2008, like the first in 2002, will not address a special theme but will review overall progress towards all six goals at the halfway mark.

Each year the information available for monitoring progress on the EFA goals improves.

New monitoring features

In this 2007 Report:

- The data provided by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) cover more countries and are more up to date, including for the school year that ended in 2004.
- A major problem with data availability for some countries persists, however, often because of recent or current armed conflict. This means the EFA situation in these countries is unlikely to be improving, but the lack of data makes it impossible to include them in the Report's statistical analyses.
- Greater use is made of other sources of data, particularly household surveys, to look in detail at educational coverage across regions, in terms of rural or urban location, household spending on education and, especially, participation in ECCE programmes and the characteristics of children who are out of school. For ECCE, UNESCO's International Bureau of Education (IBE), together with UNICEF, has established a database of country profiles especially for this Report, which may be consulted on the Report website (www.efareport.unesco.org).
- National learning assessments are examined, supplementing previous Reports' attention to regional and international ones.
- Coverage of secondary education is deepened by distinguishing for the first time between lower and upper secondary education. As countries become increasingly committed to universal basic education, they are also extending their definitions of it to include two or three years of the secondary cycle. Indeed, it is increasingly clear that the availability of lower secondary school places is an important determinant of primary completion. Secondary education is also important for EFA because in many countries it is the minimum qualification for primary teachers. Finally, as the fastest growing level in developing countries, secondary education is increasingly in direct competition with primary education for public funding.
- Analysis of aid flows for education in general and EFA in particular is extended with improved data from the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and by taking a closer look at relationships between donors and recipient governments, as well as attempting, with limited success, to review aid flows for ECCE.

Box 1.1: The Dakar EFA goals and the Millennium Development Goals

Building on two United Nations instruments, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the international community adopted the World Declaration on Education for All at Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. At its heart is the recognition that universal education is the key to sustainable development, social justice and a brighter future.

The 2000 Dakar Framework for Action expresses the international community's commitment to a broad-based strategy for ensuring that the basic learning needs of every child, youth and adult are met within a generation and sustained thereafter. It sets the six EFA goals:

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.
4. Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.
6. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), approved by world leaders at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, form an agenda for reducing poverty and improving lives. For each goal, one or more targets have been set, most for 2015. The first goal cannot be achieved without education, and two other goals and two targets make explicit reference to education:

Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.

Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education. (Target: ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls, will be able to complete a full course of good quality primary schooling.)

Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women. (Target: eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015.)

Sources: UNESCO (2000a); United Nations (2001a).

With a 2015 target date for achieving the goals, very little time for action is left

Two aspects of EFA remain very difficult to monitor:

- Goal 3 on learning needs of youth and adults. Interpretations vary enormously, but the Report suggests how progress in this area might be monitored in future, using empirical studies of what countries are actually doing.
- National spending on education. Reporting on national expenditure remains patchy. The UIS is working to improve the data, starting with sub-Saharan Africa, but this remains the weakest element of EFA monitoring. This is unfortunate, as adequate finances and strong commitment hold the key to sustaining and extending the EFA progress achieved so far.

Addressing disadvantage and inclusion

The latest *World Development Report* from the World Bank (2005d) and *Human Development Report* from UNDP (2005) both highlight the inequities in opportunities that various groups face, and the setbacks these gaps can result in for children, adults and social and economic development. Educational attainment is one, if not the major, determinant of life chances and the opportunity to escape poverty. These facts are powerful reasons for reinforcing efforts to achieve the EFA goals.

Aggregate measures of education coverage hide wide variations among particular groups of children and young adults. This Report provides examples of such variations, taking a closer look at children who are not attending primary school and describing specific efforts to reduce inequities and promote inclusion. It also underlines the financial implications for governments of trying to include the hardest-to-reach children, youth and illiterate adults through such actions as fee reduction, and the hiring and training of more teachers. Access to ECCE programmes, in particular, is shown to be highly inequitable in most developing countries, yet ECCE is a particularly effective instrument for offsetting disadvantage.

The need for urgent action

With a 2015 target date for achieving the goals, very little time for action is left. A majority of countries have a six-year primary school cycle. To achieve UPE in these countries by 2015, all children of the age to complete primary school that year will have to be enrolled by 2009, less than three years away. Two steps are needed: first, identifying all hard-to-reach children and assessing their characteristics and the obstacles

to their attending school; and second, devising strategies and policies to reach them, and obtaining and allocating the financial resources, both domestic and external, needed for implementation. Addressing the first part of the gender goal, ending disparities in primary and secondary education, whose target date of 2005 has already been missed, is equally urgent. Gender issues are a recurring theme throughout the Report.

A sense of urgency about EFA is particularly necessary because many governments and donors are starting to focus more attention on economic growth and the role of the upper levels of education in fuelling the knowledge economy. The international community thus needs extra vigilance to keep the EFA goals at the forefront of international and national agendas, to maintain a comprehensive view of EFA that recognizes all six goals as interrelated parts of a whole and to ensure that the necessary financing is in place.

ECCE: a conceptual framework

The first EFA goal – expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education – includes several concepts that are variously interpreted: early childhood, care, education, and vulnerable and disadvantaged children. The goal’s complexity, along with its intersectoral nature and the absence of a quantitative target, makes it more difficult to monitor than some of the other EFA goals.

Understandings of and approaches to *early childhood* vary depending on local traditions, cultures, family structures and the organization of primary schooling (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Nsamenang, 2006; Woodhead, 2006). It is important to acknowledge and value this diversity. For monitoring purposes, this Report follows the increasingly recognized convention that early childhood covers the period from birth to age 8.¹ The early years are a time of remarkable brain development that lays the foundation for later learning. During this time, young children learn by manipulating objects and materials, exploring the world around them and experimenting, using trial and error. Also during the early years children receiving emotional support develop their sense of personal and physical security, and strengthen bonds with family and community. By age 8, all children around the world are expected to be in primary school.²

1. Although the prenatal period is often included as important for maternal and child health, it is beyond the scope of this Report.

2. Children’s transition to primary school may occur as early as age 4, but nowhere is it supposed to occur later than age 8.

Guided by the Expanded Commentary on the Dakar Framework for Action on EFA goal 1 (Box 1.2), this Report focuses on both the *care* and the *education* of young children. The term 'care' generally includes attention to health, hygiene and nutrition within a nurturing and safe environment that supports children's cognitive and socio-emotional well-being. Use of the term 'education' in the early childhood years is much broader than (pre-)schooling, capturing learning through early stimulation, guidance and a range of developmental activities and opportunities. In practice, care and education cannot be separated, and good-quality provision for young children necessarily addresses both dimensions (Choi, 2002; Myers, 1995; OECD, 2001).³ In this respect, care and education are parts of a whole: both are needed to foster holistic growth, development and learning, as the Dakar Framework states.

Defining ECCE

Drawing on this holistic approach, the Report uses the following definition:

Early childhood care and education supports children's survival growth, development and learning – including health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development – from birth to entry into primary school⁴ in formal, informal and non-formal settings. Often provided by a mix of government institutions, non-governmental organizations, private providers, communities and families, ECCE represents a continuum of interconnected arrangements involving diverse actors: family, friends, neighbours; family day care for a group of children in a provider's home; centre-based programmes; classes/programmes in schools; and programmes for parents.

ECCE policies and provision vary according to the age and development of the child, and can be organized in formal, non-formal and informal arrangements (Figure 1.1). The broad, holistic scope of ECCE is captured in the policy objectives associated with it around the world:

- providing health care, immunization, feeding and nutrition;
- supporting new parents through information sharing and parenting education;
- creating a safe environment for young children to play and socialize with their peers;
- compensating for disadvantage and fostering the resilience of vulnerable children;
- promoting 'school readiness' and preparation for primary school;

Box 1.2: Comment on EFA goal 1

'All young children must be nurtured in safe and caring environments that allow them to become healthy, alert and secure and be able to learn. The past decade has provided more evidence that good quality early childhood care and education, both in families and in more structured programmes, have a positive impact on the survival, growth, development and learning potential of children. Such programmes should be comprehensive, focusing on all of the child's needs and encompassing health, nutrition and hygiene as well as cognitive and psycho-social development. They should be provided in the child's mother tongue and help to identify and enrich the care and education of children with special needs. Partnerships between governments, NGOs, communities and families can help ensure the provision of good care and education for children, especially for those most disadvantaged, through activities centred on the child, focused on the family, based within the community and supported by national, multi-sectoral policies and adequate resources.

'Governments ... have the primary responsibility of formulating early childhood care and education policies within the context of national EFA plans, mobilizing political and popular support, and promoting flexible, adaptable programmes for young children that are appropriate to their age and not mere downward extensions of formal school systems. The education of parents and other caregivers in better child care, building on traditional practices, and the systematic use of early childhood indicators, are important elements in achieving this goal.'

Source: UNESCO (2000a).

- providing custodial care for children of working parents and family members;
- strengthening communities and social cohesion (Kamerman 2005; UNESCO-IBE, 2006; UNICEF, 2006).

Though the various international agencies differ in the terminology they use (Choi, 2002), there is general recognition of the benefits of such a holistic approach, both within ECCE programmes and at home, as well as during the transition to primary school. This Report takes a similarly broad approach to the monitoring of ECCE. It looks at the family and community contexts, the institutions, the programmes and the policies that affect children's survival, growth, development, learning and well-being. It covers a wide variety of ECCE arrangements (Figure 1.1).

Care and education cannot be separated, and good-quality provision for young children necessarily addresses both

3. For example, many early childhood specialists argue that programmes labelled 'child care' should provide opportunities for children to grow and learn, and those labelled 'early education' should nurture children and promote their social and emotional well-being.

4. Where primary school starts at age 6, for example, ECCE programmes serve children from birth to age 5 and primary school covers the rest of early childhood (ages 6 to 8).

Figure 1.1: Schematic description of approaches to the care and education of young children

Age	Organized care and education	Informal care and child-rearing	
8	C. Primary education (ISCED* level 1)	<p>D. Informal provision of care for children aged 0 to 8, by parents or extended family, mainly at home but sometimes in other family or community settings.</p> <p>Ideally, children's health, nutrition, cognitive and psychosocial needs are addressed.</p>	
7			
6	B. ECCE policies and programmes** for ages 3 and up		
5			B1. Pre-primary education programmes designed for children at least 3 years old (ISCED 0)
4			B2. Non-formal education programmes (age 3+)
3	A. ECCE policies and programmes** for ages 0 to 2		
2			A1. Organized care and education programmes
1			A2. Non-formal care or education programmes
0	A3. Parental leave		

Providers:
 Government (national, subnational), private (non-profit and for-profit), international non-governmental organization, community-based organization.

* International Standard Classification of Education, a system designed by UNESCO and the OECD as an instrument for assembling, compiling and presenting comparable indicators and statistics of education within countries and internationally.

** To be holistic, policies and programmes should address health, hygiene, nutrition, social, emotional and educational needs of children.

EFA goal 1 explicitly calls for expanding and improving ECCE for the most *vulnerable and disadvantaged children*, which makes issues of targeting potentially more important here than for other EFA goals. The benefits of good-quality ECCE are greater for the vulnerable and disadvantaged than for others. The goal's focus on these children is consistent with a rights-based perspective and with the importance of equity and inclusion to EFA more broadly. Just as early childhood arrangements vary among and within countries, so do national and local definitions of 'vulnerable and disadvantaged children'.⁵ Some types of vulnerability and disadvantage are specific to certain difficult contexts (e.g. armed conflict) while others are

less so. Poverty is a principal source of disadvantage and it aggravates other types of vulnerability. Even in high-income countries, it is often the disadvantaged who would benefit most from early childhood programmes but who have the least access to them. This Report pays particular attention to how public policy can be designed to include the disadvantaged in ECCE and how programmes themselves can best be adapted to diverse participation.

ECCE: a right in itself

Among the EFA goals, developing country governments thus far have generally given less policy attention to early childhood (and to literacy) than to primary education and gender parity. For vulnerable and disadvantaged children, the lack of a national ECCE policy truly represents a missed opportunity. Where ECCE does get attention, it is usually geared towards ages 3 and up, and focused on the years before primary school entry, leaving opportunities for younger children overlooked.

ECCE, like EFA more generally, is both a right and a major contributor to development and poverty reduction. Fortunately, international commitment to early childhood is growing. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed by 192 nations, focuses on guaranteeing the rights of young children to survive, develop and be protected. The 1990 World Declaration on Education for All states that 'learning begins at birth' and encourages the development of ECCE. The World Education Forum at Dakar in 2000 reaffirmed the importance of ECCE in reaching basic education goals, as did the UN Special Session on Children in 2002. These groundbreaking legal and political commitments all recognize that children are born with the right to have their learning needs met through approaches that promote their holistic development. To date, however, these rights are far from the reality for many children.

5. Country definitions include poor children; children with physical, emotional and learning disabilities; children in emergencies (including refugees and internally displaced children); working children in exploitative conditions; malnourished and undernourished children; abused and neglected children; street children; orphans and children in institutions; children infected and affected by HIV/AIDS; unregistered children; indigenous children; linguistic, ethnic and cultural minority children; and migrant and nomad children.

Recent demographic, economic, social and political trends have increased the need for comprehensive ECCE policies and programmes. Urbanization and the resulting changes to household structures have reduced the role of extended family members as carers. Growing numbers of working mothers with young children have increased the demand for non-parental child care. Pressures to increase competitiveness in a world economy that is increasingly knowledge-based have led to calls for improving children's 'school readiness'. World health crises (particularly HIV/AIDS) and other emergencies (e.g. famine, natural disaster and war) require responses to protect the safety and well-being of young children. These contextual trends have influenced the types and coverage of ECCE programmes, as well as the extent to which nations have made progress towards achieving EFA goal 1.

A powerful boost to education and development

In addition to being an important goal in itself, ECCE can contribute to the realization of the other EFA goals and the MDGs. Children who participate in ECCE and have positive early learning experiences make a better transition to primary school, and are more likely to begin and complete it (EFA goal 2). By reducing dropout, repetition and special education placements, ECCE can improve the internal efficiency of primary education and decrease costs for both governments and households. Many ECCE programmes provide carers with access to parenting education and other forms of support, which in turn can improve adult learning and skills (EFA goals 3 and 4). ECCE is also an important instrument for promoting gender parity (EFA goal 5). When young children attend ECCE programmes, their older sisters or other female kin are relieved of care responsibilities, a common barrier to girls' enrolment in primary

school. Some evidence regarding primary school outcomes indicates that girls benefit more than boys from participation in ECCE. The programmes also provide an opportunity to reduce stereotypes about traditional gender roles and to foster gender equality at an age when young children are developing understandings of identity, empathy, tolerance and morality. Participation in good-quality ECCE is linked with achievement at subsequent levels of education and contributes to the quality of the education system as a whole (EFA goal 6). Moreover, when the transition to primary education is well managed, ECCE has the potential to influence the quality of pedagogy in primary school, making it more child-centred, for example.

Reaching the MDGs and reducing poverty depends on efforts to support young children's rights to health, education, protection and equality. Holistic ECCE can make a major difference in reducing poverty and hunger (MDG 1) and child mortality (MDG 4), and can help combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (MDG 6). This role of ECCE as part of a broader anti-poverty strategy deserves far greater recognition by the international community (UNICEF, 2003).

Recognizing the benefits of good-quality ECCE to children, families and society, most OECD countries provide children with access to at least two years of free ECCE before they begin primary school, and parents receive maternal or parental leave benefits. Over the past two decades, these countries have focused on strengthening the quality and the coherence of such services (OECD, 2001). Although a growing number of policy-makers elsewhere realize the early years are a springboard for future academic and economic success, and for reducing poverty, access to good quality ECCE is still not widespread, particularly in the poorest countries. The time has come to move ECCE up the policy agenda in the developing world and among international donors in order to achieve EFA and to reduce poverty. ■

Good-quality ECCE contributes to the quality of the education system as a whole