

On the road in Chiapas, Mexico.

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PART IV. Setting priorities

Chapter 9

EFA: action now

Chapter 1 stressed the importance of taking a comprehensive approach to EFA, of emphasizing equity and inclusion, and of taking urgent action – now. This concluding chapter summarizes progress towards the Education for All goals, only nine years before the 2015 target date and only three years before all children must be enrolled in primary school if they are to complete it by 2015. The chapter then reviews the key elements required of a national and international action agenda if the goals, including that for ECCE (this Report's special theme), are to be met on time.

The fastest progress is being made in the countries furthest from universal primary education

Where does the world stand?

The overall EFA picture is mixed. There has been significant progress since Dakar, especially on access to primary education, including for girls. The fastest progress is being made in the countries furthest from universal primary education, but it remains inadequate for the UPE and primary gender goals to be met on time. The rest of the EFA agenda is lagging, in particular with regard to improving adult literacy and to expanding programmes for children before they enter primary school. Table 9.1 summarizes progress since Dakar for EFA as a whole, for the individual goals and for related domestic and international financing. Some trends are very encouraging while others are worrying.

A nine-point agenda

To consolidate progress and to meet all the EFA goals on time, including that for ECCE, the agenda should focus on nine areas:

1. *Returning to the comprehensive approach of Dakar.* There is progress where there is commitment and prioritization – i.e. primary school enrolment, including for girls, which has captured both domestic and international attention, including that of the Fast Track Initiative. Education for All, however, is a comprehensive approach to basic education. Not all governments have taken full public responsibility for some of its most important elements, particularly adult literacy (globally, a staggering one in five adults remain without basic literacy skills) and ECCE, the special theme of this Report. It is also increasingly clear that it is necessary to expand the supply of lower secondary places as an incentive to complete primary school and hence achieve the universal primary education goal.
2. *Acting with urgency.* Time is running out. Even achieving UPE by 2015 is uncertain. In some countries, the gender parity goal, already missed in 2005, may not be met by 2015. We must act now to get all children into school and take steps to ensure that they stay there and that they learn. It is also very important to enrol disadvantaged and vulnerable children in ECCE, as they have the most to gain. Moreover, a major effort for adult literacy is seriously overdue (see the 2006 Report); the United Nations Literacy Decade has yet to take off.

Basic education increasingly faces competition for funds as governments and aid agencies turn towards sectors more commonly associated with economic growth, such as infrastructure, and towards upper secondary and higher education. Countries currently or recently in conflict have no data and so tend not to be included in this Report's analysis, but their EFA situation is unlikely to be improving. Creating education opportunities for children living in conflict and post-conflict situations should be a very high priority.

3. *Emphasizing equity and inclusion.* Despite progress, most disadvantaged children do not benefit from ECCE and far too many primary school age children are still out of school. It is more challenging and costly to compensate for disadvantage as children get older than to institute preventive measures and support early in life. A disaggregated approach is needed, focusing on particular regions and population groups within countries. In too many countries, direct and indirect household costs, including the need to have children work to supplement household income, and the payment of fees at ECCE and primary level, remain a major obstacle to poor children's early access and continued participation. For effective inclusion, which must start when children are young, there is a need also to promote the mother tongue as the initial language of instruction, to establish gender equality in staff-pupil interactions and learning materials, to ensure that children from diverse backgrounds are treated equally, to accommodate children living with disabilities, to adjust the school year to the agricultural calendar as appropriate, and to have schools and adult programmes close to where people live.
4. *Increasing public spending and focusing it better.* Many governments are not spending enough public funds on good-quality basic education, and certainly not enough on literacy and ECCE. There is a need to focus financial resources on key requirements for achieving EFA, such as increasing the supply of teachers, providing incentives to teach in rural areas, implementing policies of inclusion and expanding adult literacy and ECCE. A clear – and sustained – focus on basic education is essential to offset the increasing pressures for spending on other levels of education.
5. *Augmenting international aid and allocating it where it is most needed.* Both actual and

Table 9.1: EFA progress since Dakar

Commitments	Encouraging	Worrying
EFA as a whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The EFA Development Index (EDI) increased from 2003 to 2004 in seventy-five countries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The EDI fell in forty countries. The lack of data for a significant number of countries, particularly those recently or currently in conflict, makes it difficult to paint the full global picture (it is unlikely that the EFA situation is improving in most conflict or post-conflict countries).
Early childhood care and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-primary enrolment increased sharply, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and South and West Asia. Slightly more than half the world's countries have at least one formal ECCE programme for children under 3. About 80% of developing countries have some form of legally established maternity leave, although enforcement varies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Despite progress, millions of children still do not have access to the basic immunization, clean water, adequate food and early stimulation they need for survival, growth and development. Coverage for both under-3s and pre-primary remains considerably lower for developing countries than for developed ones. Regional differences on pre-primary are striking, e.g. relatively high coverage in Latin America and the Caribbean, very low in sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States. Nearly half of all countries have no formal ECCE programmes for under-3s. Variation within countries reveals large disparities in access to ECCE between rich and poor and between urban and rural. Those least likely to be enrolled are the poor, rural and/or disadvantaged – those who would benefit the most from ECCE. ECCE data collection is generally inadequate to monitor progress fully in developing countries.
Universal primary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enrolment ratios increased considerably, especially in the regions farthest from the goals (sub-Saharan Africa, and South and West Asia). Grade 1 enrolment rose sharply, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, and South and West Asia. The number of children out of school declined. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Despite progress, too many children are still out of school. The most marginalized are difficult to enrol and retain. Attendance remains below enrolment. School retention and completion is still too low in many countries.
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About two-thirds of countries have achieved parity in primary education. 94 girls per 100 boys are now enrolled in primary education, compared with 92 in 1999. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 2005 target date for primary and secondary parity was missed. Disparities at the expense of girls remain significant at primary level in many countries, often those with the lowest enrolment ratios. Only one-third of countries have achieved parity in secondary education. Gender equality is still an issue.
Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupil/teacher ratios improved slightly in every region except South and West Asia. Developing countries' commitment to monitoring quality is rising, as evidenced by the expanding number of national learning assessments and increased participation in international and regional assessments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupil/teacher ratios in primary education remain above 40:1 in twenty-eight countries. There are too few teachers to meet UPE goal and improve pupil/teacher ratios, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. High proportions of teachers are untrained and unqualified. Teacher absenteeism remains a serious problem. New analyses of international learning assessments confirm that students from poor households perform worse than others.
Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult and youth literacy rates have improved in all regions since 1990, but very little in the past few years. The absolute number of youth illiterates declined except in sub-Saharan Africa. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult literacy rates remain below 70% in South and West Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States and the Caribbean. 781 million adults, two-thirds of them women, are not literate. At the current pace of improvement, the number of adults without minimal literacy skills will decrease by only 100 million by 2015. The literate environment receives relatively little attention. Too few countries are initiating direct assessments of literacy.
Education finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public spending on education increased as a share of GNP in about two-thirds of the countries with data. Increasing numbers of countries have reduced primary school fees and other household costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The share of public spending on education in GNP declined in forty-one countries, particularly in Latin America and in South and West Asia. Too many countries still charge fees.
International aid to education (constant 2003 prices)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aid rose by 85% in real terms from 2000 to 2004 (but following a decline before 2000). Aid to basic education in low-income countries more than doubled in real terms, to US\$3.4 billion, in the same period. Donor pledges will likely increase this to US\$5.4 billion by 2010. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aid to basic education in low-income countries falls far short of the estimated US\$11 billion per year needed now to achieve EFA (even if 2010 pledges are realized). Most aid is still not sufficiently long term or predictable.

ECCE requires high-level political support for early childhood policies and programmes in countries, and technical support internationally

pledged levels of aid for basic education are increasing, but they remain insufficient, given the urgency of achieving EFA. Aid to basic education in low-income countries must at least *double*; it must include aid for literacy and ECCE; it must be more predictable over a longer term; and it must be reallocated towards those countries most in need. If the Fast Track Initiative is to become a key vehicle for this endeavour, it also needs to receive much more funding, to deliver more predictable aid flows over a longer period and to broaden its focus beyond primary education to include all six EFA goals.

6. *Moving ECCE up domestic and international agendas, stressing a holistic approach.* ECCE requires high-level political support for early childhood policies and programmes in countries, and technical support internationally. Given ECCE's complexity, and its unique role in providing the individual child with strong foundations for life and learning, it is important to (a) develop a national policy framework with goals, regulations, monitoring of quality and funding commitments that span the full range of provision for children from birth to age 8; and (b) clearly designate a lead ministry or agency for ECCE that works with all related sectors. ECCE must encompass policies and programmes for children under 3, including support to parents, as well as for pre-schoolers. Although there is no one model of ECCE provision, programmes that combine nutrition, health, care and education are more effective in improving young children's current welfare and their future development than those confined to one aspect. Inclusive programmes need to build on traditional child care practices, respect children's linguistic and cultural diversity, and mainstream children with special educational needs and disabilities. The private sector plays an important role in the delivery of ECCE in many countries; the public sector must therefore both regulate it and develop effective partnerships with it, to safeguard against inequities in access and quality.
7. *Increasing public finance for ECCE and targeting it.* Although a national ECCE policy should encompass all young children, it may be appropriate initially, given resource scarcities, to target public resources to vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

To secure both domestic and international resources, and to raise the overall profile of ECCE, it is essential to include it in key documents for public resource allocation and for attracting aid, such as national budgets, sector plans and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. Other donors need to follow UNICEF's lead and prioritize early childhood issues.

8. *Upgrading the ECCE workforce, especially as regards qualifications, training and working conditions.* Since all the evidence demonstrates that the quality of child-staff interaction is the single most critical element in determining the quality of ECCE, nothing is more important than attracting and retaining sufficient numbers of trained and motivated staff. It is essential to overcome the common tendency to undervalue ECCE staff in terms of pay and in providing appropriate training. Quality standards are needed for all the different types of ECCE personnel. In addition, to be effective staff need reasonable working conditions as regards factors such as child/staff ratios, group sizes and the adequacy of materials.
 9. *Improving the monitoring of ECCE.* As this Report shows, it is not easy to monitor progress towards the ECCE goal, especially as it relates to under-3s, given current data availability. Box 9.1 suggests options for improving data collection and provides a possible agenda for governments, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the international community.
- The considerable progress made towards EFA since Dakar provides a measure of just how much can be accomplished when countries and the international community join forces for concerted action. Yet EFA requires a more comprehensive approach and more sustained efforts. We must not let interest and momentum flag. EFA means education for all, not just education for some. It means all six goals, not just those related to primary school. It means paying particular attention to the early years, when effective steps to offset disadvantage can be taken at lowest cost and when strong foundations are most easily laid. Finally, it means staying the course. Failing the youngest generation today not only violates their rights, it also sows the seeds of deeper poverty and inequalities tomorrow. The challenges are clear, the agenda too. The time for action is now. ■

Box 9.1: Augmenting and improving data on ECCE

Major efforts are needed by national and international agencies to expand and improve systematic information related to the following dimensions of ECCE:

Basic health and nutrition data

- Statistics on food intake, nutrition levels, stunting and survival rates for young children are regularly collected by the WHO, the UN Population Division, UNAIDS and UNICEF. The quality and geographic coverage of such indicators are, on the whole, quite good. Donors could provide technical and financial assistance to strengthen capacity in countries needing additional support to collect such information. Reporting basic health and survival data by subnational administrative level and by household characteristics would improve their policy relevance.

ECCE programmes for infants and toddlers

- In many countries, data are unavailable on ECCE programmes (day care, crèches, nurseries, as well as nutrition and health oriented programmes). For children under 3, little is known about the organized care provided by public and private agencies and organizations. Statistics on participation in such programmes have been collected, on an ad hoc basis, in an increasing number of developing countries through household surveys such as UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and the USAID-funded Demographic and Health Surveys. Understanding differences in access to ECCE programmes among young children, especially those from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds, is critical. Such surveys can complement administrative data, the collection of which needs to be improved.
- The UIS, in cooperation with other agencies, could expand the scope of its comparatively recent programme of data gathering on children under 3, which was initiated for the pre-Dakar EFA 2000 assessment exercise. Doing so will require continued and sustained exchanges with the national authorities concerned, with a view to improving the coverage and comparability of data, including more emphasis on all ECCE programmes, not just pre-primary education.

Pre-primary education

- Pre-primary education data compiled by the UIS, the OECD and Eurostat for the relevant regional groupings form the most complete set of worldwide information on the education component of ECCE. Given the considerable cross-national variations in pre-primary education, it would be useful to publish enrolment data for specific age brackets on a regular basis. Some categories of administrative data on the education component that may be too difficult or costly to collect annually could be made available less frequently, for instance every three or five years. Children's background characteristics, detailed by residence, administrative subdivision, duration and content of pre-primary programmes, could also usefully be provided periodically.

Such data could be collected jointly by the UIS and the International Bureau of Education (IBE), as has been done in the past.

Staff

- In addition to existing data on pre-primary teachers, more information is needed on the type, characteristics, employment, professional status and deployment of all categories of staff who work with young children. These data are necessary to develop policies to recruit and deploy the human resources necessary for expanding and improving opportunities for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Quality

- The need for, and usefulness of, standardized comparative data on ECCE programme quality is controversial. Yet cross-national indicators of structural quality could very usefully be compiled (e.g. teacher/pupil ratios, teachers' qualifications, expenditure and programme standards). While caution clearly is needed in interpreting and drawing conclusions from information from such a variety of contexts, it is important to recognize that a profile of quality is much more reliable than individual indicators. Once national quality assessments have been made, evidence of improvement over time should be reported to international monitoring bodies, using nationally defined baseline measures.

Expenditure

- Data on expenditure on pre-primary education are more scant than at other levels of education and are often limited to public expenditure. Cross-national data on expenditure on ECCE programmes other than pre-primary education are almost nonexistent, as are data on household spending for ECCE and on international aid for ECCE; steps need to be taken to collect all these types of data. Efforts to assess the costs of ECCE programmes are under way in various countries, mostly on an experimental basis. International organizations could build on these national case studies to guide countries in producing comparable cost information.

Qualitative data

- Qualitative data can supplement the picture of ECCE provision obtained from quantitative indicators. They should ideally include information about public policies on early childhood, the types and availability of ECCE programmes, needs assessments by parents and ECCE staff, and programme outcomes. Such data, while difficult to gather, process and summarize, can be collected through sample surveys jointly undertaken by national, regional and/or international institutions. The development of relatively standard categories and common methodologies is important to improve the availability and quality of such data.