

Highlights of the EFA Report 2008

Major developments since 2000

- Primary school enrolment rose from 647 million to 688 million worldwide between 1999 and 2005, increasing by 36% in sub-Saharan Africa and 22% in South and West Asia. As a result, the number of out-of-school children declined, with the pace of this decrease particularly marked after 2002.
- Rapid progress towards universal enrolment and gender parity at the primary level for example in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, India, Mozambique, the United Republic of Tanzania, Yemen and Zambia shows that national political will combined with international support can make a difference.
- The cost of schooling remains a major obstacle to education for millions of children and youth despite the abolition of primary school tuition fees in fourteen countries since 2000.
- The gender parity goal has been missed: only about one-third of countries reported parity in both primary and secondary education in 2005, with only three reaching it since 1999.
- An increasing number of international, regional and national assessments report low and unequal learning outcomes, reflecting the extent to which poor education quality is undermining the achievement of EFA.
- National governments and donors have favoured formal primary schooling over early childhood, literacy and skills programmes for youth and adults despite the direct impact of these on achieving universal primary education and gender parity.
- Illiteracy is receiving minimal political attention and remains a global disgrace, keeping one in five adults (one in four women) on the margins of society.
- Aid to basic education in low-income countries more than doubled between 2000 and 2004 but decreased significantly in 2005.

Where the world stands on the six EFA goals

- Out of 129 countries, 51 have achieved or are close to achieving the four most quantifiable EFA goals,¹ 53 are in an intermediate position and 25 are far from achieving EFA as a whole, the EFA Development Index shows. The lowest category would be larger still if data were available for a number of fragile states, including conflict or post-conflict countries with very low levels of education development.

1. Early childhood care and education

- Although child mortality rates have dropped, a majority of countries are not taking the necessary policy measures to provide care and education to children below age 3.
- The provision of pre-primary education for children aged 3 and above has improved but remains scarce across sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States.
- Early childhood care and education programmes generally do not reach the poorest and most disadvantaged children, who stand to gain the most from them in terms of health, nutrition and cognitive development.

1. The EFA Development Index reflects progress towards the goals of universal primary education, adult literacy, gender parity and education quality.

2. Universal primary education

- Twenty-three countries that lacked legal provisions for compulsory education in 2000 have since established them. Compulsory education laws now exist in 95% of 203 countries and territories.
- The global net enrolment ratio rose from 83% to 87% between 1999 and 2005, faster than from 1991 to 1999. Participation levels increased most rapidly in sub-Saharan Africa (23%) and South and West Asia (11%).
- The number of out-of-school children dropped by 24 million to 72 million between 1999 and 2005. Thirty-five fragile states account for 37% of all out-of-school children.
- Despite overall enrolment increases, subnational disparities in school participation persist between regions, provinces or states and between urban and rural areas. Children from poor, indigenous and disabled populations are also at a systematic disadvantage, as are those living in slums.
- On current trends, fifty-eight out of eighty-six countries that have not yet reached universal primary enrolment will not achieve it by 2015.

3. Learning needs of young people and adults

- Non-formal education programmes remain neglected in terms of public funding, although some governments have recently developed national frameworks for sustained provision.
- Household surveys show that non-formal education is nonetheless the main route to learning for many disadvantaged youth and adults in some of the world's poorest countries.

4. Adult literacy

- Worldwide, 774 million adults lack basic literacy skills, as measured by conventional methods. Some 64% of them are women, a share virtually unchanged since the early 1990s. Direct measurement of literacy skills would significantly increase the global estimate of the number of adults denied the right to literacy.

- Most countries have made little progress during the past decade in reducing the absolute number of adult illiterates, with the notable exception of China.
- The adult literacy rate in developing countries increased from 68% to 77% between the periods 1985–1994 and 1995–2004.
- Of the 101 countries still far from achieving 'universal literacy', 71 will not succeed in halving their adult illiteracy rates by 2015.

5. Gender

- Only 59 countries with data had achieved gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005; 75% of countries are at parity or close to it at primary level, while 47% are close to reaching the goal in secondary education.
- Boys' underparticipation and underachievement are of growing concern in secondary education.
- Only 18 out of 113 countries that missed the gender parity goal at primary and secondary level in 2005 stand a chance of achieving it by 2015.
- Gender equality remains elusive: sexual violence, insecure school environments and inadequate sanitation disproportionately affect girls' self-esteem, participation and retention. Textbooks, curricula and teacher attitudes continue to reinforce stereotypes on gender roles in society.

6. Quality

- Survival rates to the last grade of primary school improved between 1999 and 2004 in most countries with data but remained low in sub-Saharan Africa (median rate of 63%) and in South and West Asia (79%).
- Relatively low and unequal learning achievement in language and mathematics characterize many countries worldwide.
- Crowded and dilapidated classrooms, too few textbooks and insufficient instructional time are widespread in many developing countries and fragile states.

- Pupil/teacher ratios have increased in sub-Saharan Africa and in South and West Asia since 1999. Eighteen million new primary school teachers are needed worldwide to reach universal primary education by 2015.
- Many governments are hiring contract teachers to save costs and rapidly increase the teaching force, but where such teachers lack adequate training and service conditions, this practice could have a negative impact on quality in the future.

Financing EFA

National spending

- Outside North America and Western Europe, education expenditure as a share of GNP increased in fifty countries and decreased in thirty-four between 1999 and 2005.
- Public expenditure on education increased by over 5% annually in sub-Saharan Africa and in South and West Asia, the two regions farthest from achieving the EFA goals.
- Countries with primary net enrolment ratios below 80% in 2005 but making significant progress towards UPE increased their education expenditure as a share of GNP from 3.4% in 1999 to 4.2% in 2005, on average. In countries where progress has been slower, the average share decreased.

Aid to basic education

- Commitments to basic education increased from US\$2.7 billion in 2000 to US\$5.1 billion in 2004 before declining to US\$3.7 billion in 2005.
- The increase particularly benefited low-income countries, which received on average US\$3.1 billion a year in 2004 and 2005. On current trends, and if pledges are met, bilateral aid to basic education will likely reach US\$5 billion a year in 2010. Even when multilateral aid is included, the total will still be well below the US\$11 billion a year required to reach the EFA goals.
- Aid to education is still not targeted to the neediest countries, and a minute share goes to early childhood and literacy programmes.

Top policy priorities

- Increased participation, equity and quality can be promoted together through a mix of adequately financed universal and targeted measures that encompass all six EFA goals.
- Education policies must focus on inclusion, literacy, quality, capacity development and finance.
- In addition the international architecture for EFA must be made more effective.

National governments

Measures to promote inclusion

- assure provision of early childhood care and education programmes with health, nutrition and education components, especially for the most disadvantaged children;
- abolish school fees and provide enough places and teachers in school to cope with new entrants;
- provide financial support such as scholarships, cash or in-kind transfers to children from poorer households;
- take measures to alleviate the need for child labour and allow for flexible schooling and non-formal equivalency courses for working children and youth;
- promote inclusive policies that open schools to disabled children, indigenous children and those from other disadvantaged groups;
- address gender disparities by increasing the numbers of female teachers in countries with low enrolment of girls and by building schools close to home and with proper sanitation;
- place top priority on boldly expanding adequately staffed and funded literacy and skills-training programmes for youth and adults, harnessing all forms of media;
- establish media and publishing policies that promote reading.

Measures to promote quality

- use incentives to attract new recruits to the teaching profession, provide adequate teacher training and professional development;
- assure sufficient instructional time and a textbook development and distribution policy;
- create safe and healthy learning environments;
- promote gender equality through teacher training, the curriculum and textbook contents;
- recognize the importance of mother tongue instruction in early childhood and the first years of primary school;
- develop constructive partnerships between government and the non-state sector to increase access to quality education.

Measures to improve capacity and financing

- maintain or, where necessary, increase public spending, noting that unit costs are likely to rise for enrolling the most disadvantaged and marginalized;
- increase financing for early childhood, literacy and quality, especially teacher training and professional development;
- strengthen management capacity at all levels of government;
- coordinate early childhood and adult literacy programmes with all involved ministries and NGOs;
- formally engage civil society in EFA policy formulation, implementation and monitoring;
- invest in capacity to collect, analyse and use data on education systems.

Civil society

- further strengthen civil society organizations that enable citizens to advocate for EFA and to hold government and the international community to account;
- engage with national governments in the development, implementation and monitoring of education policies;
- encourage training in education policy analysis and finance.

Donors and international agencies

- Increase aid to basic education sharply to meet the annual external financing need of US\$11 billion by 2010.
- Raise to at least 10% the share of basic education in bilateral sectoral aid.
- Improve governments' capacity to use larger amounts of aid effectively.
- Ensure that aid is:
 - more targeted, to reach the countries most in need, especially fragile states and countries in sub-Saharan Africa;
 - more comprehensive, to include early childhood, youth and adult literacy and skills programmes, and capacity development in policy, planning, implementation and monitoring;
 - more focused on EFA rather than post-secondary education;
 - more predictable, to support long-term national education plans;
 - more aligned with government programmes and priorities.