

Chapter 5

Policy conclusions and recommendations

Inequality is one of the major barriers to the goals set out in the Dakar Framework for Action. Governments across the world need to act with far greater resolve to reduce the disparities that restrict opportunity in education. One of the central lessons to emerge from this Report is that there is no quick fix for enhanced equity, or for accelerated progress towards education for all. However, it is possible to identify some of the broad principles and approaches needed to guide policy. This chapter sets out key priorities for national governments, donors and civil society.

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What governments can do

Every country faces a different set of constraints and challenges in education. That is why effective national planning is the starting point for governance reform and for the development of national strategies to accelerate progress towards EFA.

With the 2015 target date for key EFA goals drawing closer, the early warning indicators for failure are clearly visible. Particularly disconcerting is the fact that, on current trends, the goal of universal primary education (UPE) will not be achieved. Governments need to act with far greater urgency in tackling the inequalities holding back progress in this area. Simultaneously, education quality and learning achievement must be brought to the centre of national education planning at the primary level and beyond. In taking forward the EFA agenda, eight broad thematic lessons can be drawn from the experience of strong national performances.

1 Get serious about equity

Education planners need to ensure that the benefits of expanded provision are shared by disadvantaged groups and underserved regions. Practical strategies for strengthening equity include the removal of user fees, the introduction of financial incentives for the education of girls and children from disadvantaged backgrounds, targeted support to keep children in school and the deployment of well-trained teachers proficient in local languages. More equitable public spending patterns are also critical to ensure that schools, teachers and resources are skewed towards those with the greatest need rather than those with the greatest wealth.

Setting clear equity targets is one of the most important things governments can do in rethinking planning approaches. Current EFA targets, such as those in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), are set in terms of national average goals. The problem, as Chapter 2 shows, is that national averages can mask deep underlying disparities. Average progress that leaves whole sections of society behind is not consistent with the spirit of the Dakar Framework for Action: the EFA goals are for everyone. Going beyond national average targeting to identify well-defined equity goals

would make a difference at a number of levels. Even taking the political decision to adopt equity goals in education and monitor progress towards them would send an important signal. It would place inequality of opportunity where it deserves to be: at the centre of the political agenda. Concrete targets for reducing disparities could also provide a benchmark for holding political leaders to account.

Equity goals in education need to be well-defined. As in other areas discussed in this Report, there are no blueprints. The starting point is an assessment of current disparities. For purposes of illustration, the overall commitment to UPE by 2015 could be supported by interim 2010–2012 targets for, say, halving the school attendance gap between the richest and poorest 20%, or between rural and urban areas, or majority and minority ethnic populations. Specific targets could be set for particularly marginalized groups or regions with high concentrations of deprivation. Progress towards the equity targets could be monitored through household surveys and education reporting systems.

Equity targets could also play a role in informing approaches to national planning. Meaningful targets would have to be backed by financing and wider policy commitments. Particular attention would have to be paid to estimating the cost of reaching disadvantaged groups and areas, not least since the marginal costs are likely to be far higher than average costs. Similarly, extending opportunity to children from households marked by poverty, ill-health and acute vulnerability might require higher levels of per capita spending than for children from more advantaged households. This is an area that continues to receive insufficient consideration in education planning. An important priority for EFA is for governments and donors to develop estimates of the costs of reaching the marginalized and reducing disparities – and to make provisions for these costs in national budgets. Moreover, strategies for achieving equity targets in education would have to consider not just school-based policies, but also wider strategies on nutrition, health and poverty. The targets themselves could provide an opportunity to develop the type of integrated approach to education planning and poverty reduction set out in Chapter 3.

The commitment to equity has to start before primary school – and continue afterwards. Good-quality early childhood care and education

(ECCE) strengthens cognitive development and helps prepare children for school. The benefits are reflected in improved attainment and achievement levels in school. Progress towards ECCE has been disappointing and highly unequal, both among and within countries. National governments should prioritize ECCE in planning, with incentives provided to improve coverage of disadvantaged children. Similarly, it is increasingly apparent that progress in many EFA areas – and towards many of the MDGs – depends on a rapid scaling up of opportunities for good-quality secondary education.

2 Provide leadership, set ambitious targets and forge effective partnerships

International evidence provides insights into the specific policies that can accelerate progress towards EFA. But the crucial ingredient for success is leadership. There is no substitute for sustained political commitment. Political leaders need to put education at the centre of national development strategies and use their influence to make equity a shared goal throughout society. They also need to reach beyond government agencies to involve civil society, the voluntary and private sectors, and groups representing the poor in policy processes. Ensuring that the voices of the poor and marginalized are heard in policy formulation is a condition for strengthened equity.

Setting clear policy objectives is crucial. Successful governments have fixed ambitious long-term goals that are supported by clear medium-term ‘stepping stone’ targets and backed by commitments on inputs ranging from classroom construction to teacher recruitment and textbook supply. Governments with less successful track records have often set ambitious goals but failed to underpin them either with coherent strategies for delivery or with predictable budget commitments.

Another crucial condition for progress in education is ensuring that the policies of departments whose work affects education are complementary rather than contradictory. Many countries have improved policy coherence within the education sector and between education and other line ministries. Sector-wide approaches have played an important role in this regard. Even so, problems remain. Education targets are often weakly integrated in national budgets and financing strategies.

Strategies for achieving equity targets in education should also consider wider constraints linked to nutrition, health and poverty

Conditional cash transfer programmes in Brazil and Mexico have demonstrated that strategies for tackling child labour, poor health and weak nutrition can yield large benefits for education

3 Strengthen wider anti-poverty commitments

It is a widely overlooked fact that sustained progress in education cannot be built on the foundations of mass poverty and deep social inequality. One in three pre-school children has what amounts to brain damage as a result of malnutrition, which constitutes a formidable obstacle to UPE. The associated facts that 10 million children die before the age of 5 and that tens of millions more suffer life-threatening diseases represent further limitations on the human right to education.

National governments should strengthen policies for combating the poverty, inequality and wider structural factors that produce such outcomes. Cash transfer programmes, targeted health interventions and more equitable public spending in health service provision all have a role to play. Child malnutrition must also be accorded a far higher priority. The bottom line is that progress in education is being held back by the failings of current national strategies for poverty reduction.

The Dakar Framework envisages the integration of education planning within effective national poverty reduction strategies. This is an important goal because many of the most insurmountable barriers to access and learning are located beyond the school. Unfortunately, progress towards coherent national strategies linking education and poverty reduction has been limited. Many countries urgently need poverty reduction strategies to address the health, nutrition and wider poverty-related constraints on progress towards EFA. Conditional cash transfer programmes in countries such as Brazil and Mexico have demonstrated that strategies for tackling child labour, poor health and weak nutrition can yield large benefits for education. All governments and donors should actively explore the potential for strengthening and expanding social protection as part of the strategy for advancing the EFA agenda. Within the education sector, far more weight should be attached to targeted interventions such as incentive programmes for children who are disadvantaged as a consequence of poverty, gender, caste, ethnicity or location. Ensuring that schools and classroom are built and teachers allocated so they are within reach of marginalized communities is also important.

4 Raise quality standards

Senior policy-makers should renew and strengthen the Dakar pledge on education quality. Policies should emphasize new approaches to teaching and learning, improved provision of learning materials and strong incentives to raise standards. National authorities, community officials and local school leaders must work together to ensure that every school becomes an effective learning environment. Such an environment requires well-nourished and motivated students, well-trained teachers using adequate facilities and instructional materials, a relevant, local-language curriculum, and a welcoming, gender-sensitive, healthy, safe environment that encourages learning. This must be accompanied by a clear definition and accurate assessment of learning outcomes. It is also important that students receive the threshold international benchmark of 850 hours per year in instructional time. These are all areas in which clear norms and policy rules have to be defined and enforced.

5 Strengthen capacity to measure, monitor and assess education quality, and inform parents and policy-makers

The methods used and the information collected in monitoring and assessment exercises should be transparent and accessible to diverse education stakeholders. Successful monitoring is not just about generating information. It is also about creating institutional mechanisms through which monitoring can inform the development and implementation of policy.

The monitoring of education quality should include three dimensions: (i) input or enabling conditions for learning (from infrastructure and learning materials to qualified, trained teachers and adequate budgets); (ii) pedagogy and the learning process, including an appropriate language of instruction, and learning time; and (iii) learning outcomes. Official reporting in these areas can be supplemented by monitoring undertaken by civil society organizations.

6 Scale up education financing with a commitment to equity

High levels of education financing do not guarantee universal access or strong learning achievements.

Nevertheless, sustained underfinancing is unequivocally bad for efficiency, equity and education quality. Many developing countries, especially (though not exclusively) in South Asia, chronically underinvest in education. Underfinancing is not consistent with a commitment to EFA or the targets set in the Dakar Framework for Action. To make matters worse, current spending patterns are often pro-rich rather than pro-poor.

Decentralization, under the right conditions, can help foster political accountability, but it is not a panacea for inequality. On the contrary, financial decentralization can widen disparities to the detriment of poor regions and disadvantaged communities. Avoiding this outcome requires a built-in commitment to equity in the financing formulas adopted for decentralization. It is important for central government to retain a strong redistributive role, facilitating the transfer of resources from richer to poorer subnational regions. In developing rules for transfers to subnational authorities, central governments must also attach sufficient weight to equity indicators – such as poverty levels, health status and children out of school – in allocating transfers. The guiding principle should be that those in greatest need receive the most per capita support. Too often the inverse is the case, with the wealthiest regions receiving the highest levels of per capita public spending in education. While one aim of decentralization is the devolution of authority, in the area of finance governments should recognize the limits to fiscal autonomy. In particular, fiscal autonomy for local governments should not mean authority to mobilize revenue through user charges in basic education. As Chapter 3 suggests, the real issue raised by decentralization is not *whether* to do it, but *how* to do it. And the starting point has to be a commitment to decentralization with equity.

7 Recognize the limits to competition and choice

Under the right conditions, competition and choice can support EFA goals. At the same time, policy-makers need to recognize that education provision cannot be reduced to oversimplified market principles. Imperfect and asymmetric information, time and distance constraints, and institutional capacity failings all impose limits on competition. Meanwhile, poverty and social disadvantage limit choice. Public-private partnership models aim to

expand choice by separating education finance and management. Voucher programmes, state funding for private schools and the development of independent schools are all public-private partnership strategies – and each has a limited record of success, even in the developed world. Private schools in Sweden are one exception to this rule – but the ‘Swedish model’ is not readily transferable to other developed countries, let alone developing ones.

Choice and competition are often presented as a solution to the failings of public provision. Some commentators view low-fee private schools in the same light. The failings of public provision are strongly evident in many countries. And millions of poor households are voting with their feet, switching to low-fee private providers. However, the vast majority of the world’s children – especially those from poor and disadvantaged households – will depend on public provision for the foreseeable future. Low-fee private schools will continue to play a role, but they are symptoms of state failure and the entry costs impose a considerable burden on poor households. Introducing choice and competition into a system in which all parents have the option of sending their children to a good-quality public provider is one thing. Using private providers to compensate for state failure is quite another – and in most cases will not be the best option when it comes to efficiency and equity. The bottom line, for governments in countries where public-sector basic education is failing the poor, is to fix the system first and consider options for competition between providers second.

8 Strengthen the recruitment, deployment and motivation of teachers

An adequate supply of motivated, qualified and properly trained teachers is a foundation of good-quality education for all. All countries have to assess remuneration levels consistent with building that foundation. Poverty-level wages and poor conditions, moreover, are not consistent with strong motivation. Improving the teaching environment through the provision of learning materials, training and support is vital for raising morale.

Hiring contract teachers can reduce the marginal costs of recruitment and thereby release resources for investment in other areas. But it can also reduce the quality of recruited teachers and weaken

Policy-makers need to recognize that education provision cannot be reduced to oversimplified market principles

motivation, with damaging consequences for children in classrooms. There is a case for recourse to contract teacher recruitment as a strategy for reaching marginalized groups and underserved areas. However, it is important for governments to recognize the potential trade-off between teacher quantity and quality that can come with contract teaching. Other strategies for reaching marginalized groups include incentives for teachers to locate in underserved areas and measures to increase recruitment from disadvantaged communities.

Performance-related pay for teachers is a popular topic in discussions of governance. In practice, however, it is difficult to implement and unlikely to create incentives for improved learning achievement. It may also have damaging consequences for equity as schools and teachers focus on the students most likely to attain high scores.

In some countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, expanding teacher recruitment is an urgent priority. UPE by 2015 will not be attainable without a marked increase in the rate of recruitment and retention. In many cases, donors will need to increase support to achieve these goals. If teacher retirement is taken into account, sub-Saharan Africa alone will need to recruit around 3.8 million teachers by 2015. □

The role of aid donors

National governments carry the main responsibility for achieving the EFA goals. Many of the developing countries that are most off track are highly dependent on aid, and will remain so for the foreseeable future. Developed countries can support progressive strategies by increasing their level of financial commitment, improving aid practices and ensuring that aid is used to support national priorities.

UPE will not be achieved without effective aid partnerships. What is needed is the renewal and the realization of the compact embodied in the Dakar Framework for Action. There are responsibilities and obligations on both sides. But donors need to demonstrate a far greater level of resolve and political leadership. This Report proposes action in four areas.

Delivering on commitments and expanding the donor base

Donors pledged in 2005 to 'double aid to halve poverty'. Since then they have instead cut development assistance. Debt relief explains only part of the reduction. Meeting the 2005 commitment requires an additional US\$30 billion (at 2004 prices) – some three times the increases currently set out in aid spending plans. The shortfall for sub-Saharan Africa is around US\$14 billion (2004 prices).

Failure to act on the Gleneagles commitment will hamper global poverty reduction efforts, with damaging consequences for education. More detailed national and international efforts to update estimates of education financing gaps are required; however, having promised that no national strategy would fail for want of finance, donors need to increase aid for basic education to at least US\$11 billion annually. In 2006, commitments to basic education in low-income countries totalled US\$3.8 billion – around a third of the level required. The two year average for 2005 and 2006 points unmistakably towards a reduction in commitments for basic education, compared with the previous two years. This is true for developing countries in general and the poorest countries in particular. Failure to reverse the trend will adversely affect future disbursements. As an immediate priority, donors should commit to an increase of US\$7 billion annually in aid financing for basic education.

Aid flows to basic education are heavily concentrated in a small group of donors. Just three donors – the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the International Development Association – accounted for half of all aid commitments and 85% of the increase in disbursements in 2006. The narrowness of the donor base is a source of underfinancing. It is also a source of potential instability and unpredictability in aid.

Strengthening the commitment to equity

Several donors appear to attach a low priority to equity in their education aid. France, Germany and Japan, for example, have shown neglect for basic education and low-income countries. Calculations for this Report suggest that France and Germany devote far more aid to bringing students to study in their domestic tertiary education systems than they spend on aid to basic education. If developing

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country governments followed this practice and allocated well over half their education budget to the tertiary level, they would – justifiably – stand accused of questionable governance practices. To avoid potential double standards, it is important for donors to consider whether their aid allocation patterns are consistent with a commitment to equity and to the spirit of the Dakar Framework for Action.

Getting behind the Fast Track Initiative

The balance sheet of the Fast Track Initiative (FTI) is a source of growing concern. In mid-2008, there were thirty-five countries with plans endorsed by the FTI, entailing programme costs estimated at US\$8 billion and external financing needs of US\$2 billion. The gap between current aid pledges and external financing requirements was around US\$640 million. With eight countries expected to join the FTI by the end of the year, that gap could climb to US\$1 billion. Another thirteen countries are scheduled to join in 2009, which means the total annual financing gap could reach US\$2.2 billion. Closing that gap is the responsibility of a wide range of bilateral and multilateral donors. However, working on an assumption that the Catalytic Fund of the FTI might be expected to cover around 40% to 50%, a prospective 2010 financing gap of around US\$1 billion will remain. These looming shortfalls pose a real and imminent threat to efforts to achieve the targets set in the Dakar Framework for Action. They also call into question donors' commitments to ensure that no viable plan for achieving UPE and wider education goals would be allowed to fail for want of financial support. Addressing the FTI deficit is an urgent priority. At the same time, it is important for the FTI to broaden its currently narrow base of donor support.

Delivering on the Paris agenda

Progress towards the goals set in the Paris Declaration for improved aid quality has been limited and uneven. Donors could do far more to reduce transaction costs and improve aid effectiveness through greater alignment of aid behind national priorities, better coordination, increased use of national financial management systems and improved predictability in aid flows. Increased emphasis on programme-based aid creates opportunities and threats. The opportunities lie in the potential for more effective national planning and donor alignment behind national

priorities. The threats derive from donors' ability to use collective action through programme aid to assert their priorities. There are no easy answers – but donors must engage in genuine dialogue. □

The role of non-government actors

This Report has emphasized the central importance of government leadership and public policy. That is not to minimize the responsibilities and capacities of other actors. Achieving EFA requires partnerships at many levels – between schools and parents, between civil society organizations and governments, between state and non-state education providers.

Civil society has a critical role to play in strengthening equity in education. Organizations of the marginalized – slum dwellers, child labourers, members of low castes, indigenous people – have been in the forefront of international efforts to extend education to all, often in the face of government indifference or outright hostility. National and international non-government organizations have also emerged as key EFA actors, holding governments to account, supporting provision and building capacity. Governance reform provides an opportunity to strengthen the voice and effectiveness of civil society organizations and to enhance participation and accountability.

Governance in education cannot be treated in isolation from wider governance issues. Democracy, transparency and the rule of law are enabling conditions for effective participation and accountability. When citizens lack a voice in choosing their government, or when they face arbitrary laws, they are unlikely to have an effective voice in framing education priorities. Within the education sector, governance reforms can play a role in devolving authority to parents and communities. Yet devolution is not an automatic ticket to empowerment; there is a danger that poor and marginalized communities will lack the capacities and resources needed for effective management. To ensure that devolved responsibilities do not result in a further widening of equity gaps, schools that are in disadvantaged areas or serving disadvantaged groups need to be provided with extra resources and support. ■

Governance reform provides an opportunity to strengthen the voice and effectiveness of civil society organizations, and to enhance participation and accountability