

Highlights of the EFA Report 2009

Headline messages

- There has been remarkable progress towards some of the EFA goals since the international community made its commitments in Dakar in 2000. Some of the world's poorest countries have demonstrated that political leadership and practical policies make a difference. However, business as usual will leave the world short of the Dakar goals. Far more has to be done to get children into school, through primary education and beyond. And more attention has to be paid to the quality of education and learning achievement.
- Progress towards the EFA goals is being undermined by a failure of governments to tackle persistent inequalities based on income, gender, location, ethnicity, language, disability and other markers for disadvantage. Unless governments act to reduce disparities through effective policy reforms, the EFA promise will be broken.
- Good governance could help to strengthen accountability, enhance participation and break down inequalities in education. However, current approaches to governance reform are failing to attach sufficient weight to equity.

Progress on the six EFA goals

Goal 1 – Early childhood care and education

- Child malnutrition is a global epidemic that affects one in three children under the age of 5 and undermines their ability to learn. Slow progress in tackling child malnutrition and ill health – especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia – is undermining progress towards universal primary education.
- Progress indicators for the well-being of children in their pre-school years are a source for concern. The development targets set in the Millennium Development Goals for child mortality and nutrition will be missed by wide margins if current trends continue.
- Major global disparities in provision continue to divide the world's richest and poorest children. In 2006, pre-primary gross enrolment ratios averaged 79% in developed countries and 36% in developing countries, falling as low as 14% in sub-Saharan Africa.

- Global disparities are mirrored in wide gaps within countries, especially between the richest and poorest children. In some countries, children from the wealthiest 20% of households are five times more likely to attend pre-school programmes than those from the poorest 20%.

Goal 2 – Universal primary education

- The average net enrolment ratios for developing countries have continued to increase since Dakar. Sub-Saharan Africa raised its average net enrolment ratio from 54% to 70% between 1999 and 2006, for an annual increase six times greater than during the decade before Dakar. The increase in South and West Asia was also impressive, rising from 75% to 86%.
- In 2006, some 75 million children, 55% girls, were not in school, almost half in sub-Saharan Africa. On current trends, millions of children will still be out of school in 2015 – the target date for universal primary education. Projections for 134 countries accounting for some two-thirds of out-of-school children in 2006 suggest that some 29 million children will be out of school in 2015 in these countries alone.

- Children from poor households, rural areas, slums and other disadvantaged groups face major obstacles in access to a good quality education. While children from the wealthiest 20% of households have already achieved universal primary school attendance in most countries, those from the poorest 20% have a long way to go.
- Trends in primary education are susceptible to public policy. Ethiopia and the United Republic of Tanzania are making remarkable progress in increasing enrolment and reaching the poor, thanks to policies such as the abolition of school fees, the construction of schools in underserved areas and increased teacher recruitment. In Nigeria and Pakistan, poor education governance is holding back progress and keeping millions of children out of school.
- In 2006, some 513 million students worldwide – or 58% of the relevant school-age population – were enrolled in secondary school, an increase of nearly 76 million since 1999. Despite progress, access remains limited for most of the world's young people. In sub-Saharan Africa, 75% of secondary-school-age children are not enrolled in secondary school.

Goal 3 – Meeting the lifelong learning needs of youth and adults

- Governments are not giving priority to youth and adult learning needs in their education policies. Meeting the lifelong needs of youth and adults needs stronger political commitment and more public funding. It will also require more clearly defined concepts and better data for effective monitoring.

Goal 4 – Adult literacy

- An estimated 776 million adults – or 16% of the world's adult population – lack basic literacy skills. About two-thirds are women. Most countries have made little progress in recent years. If current trends continue, there will be over 700 million adults lacking literacy skills in 2015.
- Between 1985–1994 and 2000–2006, the global adult literacy rate increased from 76% to 84%. However, forty-five countries have adult literacy rates below the developing country average of 79%, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa, and South and West Asia. Nearly all of them are off track to meet the adult literacy target by 2015. Nineteen of these countries have literacy rates of less than 55%.

- Major disparities in literacy levels within countries are often linked with poverty and other forms of disadvantage. In seven sub-Saharan African countries with low overall adult literacy rates, the literacy gap between the poorest and wealthiest households is more than forty percentage points.

Goal 5 – Gender

- In 2006, of the 176 countries with data, 59 had achieved gender parity in both primary and secondary education – 20 countries more than in 1999. At the primary level, about two-thirds of countries had achieved parity. However, more than half the countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia and the Arab States had not reached the target. Only 37% of countries worldwide had achieved gender parity at secondary level.
- There is a confirmed trend towards more female than male enrolments in tertiary education worldwide, in particular in more developed regions and in the Caribbean and Pacific.
- Poverty and other forms of social disadvantage magnify gender disparities. For example, in Mali girls from poor households are four times less likely to attend primary school than those from rich households, rising to eight times at secondary level.
- Once girls are in school, their progress is often hampered by teacher attitudes and gender-biased textbooks that reinforce negative gender stereotypes. These school-based factors interact with wider social and economic factors that influence school performance along gender lines.

Goal 6 – Quality

- International assessments highlight large achievement gaps between students in rich and poor countries. Within countries too, inequality exists between regions, communities, schools and classrooms. These disparities have important implications not just in education but for the wider distribution of opportunities in society.
- In developing countries there are substantially higher proportions of low learning achievement. In a recent Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality assessment (SACMEQ II) in sub-Saharan Africa, fewer than 25% of grade 6 pupils reached a desirable level of reading in four countries and only 10% in six others.

- Student background, the organization of the education system and the school environment explain learning disparities within each country. Many essential resources taken for granted in developed countries remain scarce in developing countries – including basic infrastructure such as electricity, seats and textbooks.
- More than 27 million teachers work in the world's primary schools, 80% of them in developing countries. Total primary school staff increased by 5% between 1999 and 2006. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, 1.6 million new teacher posts must be created and teachers recruited by 2015 to achieve UPE, rising to 3.8 million if retirement, resignations and losses (due to HIV/AIDs, for example) are taken into account.
- There are large national and regional disparities in pupil/teacher ratios, with marked teacher shortages in South and West Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. But it is within countries that the greatest disparities exist, with teachers unevenly distributed across regions.

Financing education

National finance

- In the majority of countries with data, national spending on education has increased since Dakar. In some countries, increased spending has been associated with substantial progress on the EFA goals. However, the share of national income devoted to education decreased in 40 of the 105 countries with data between 1999 and 2006.
- Low-income countries are still spending significantly less on education than are other countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, eleven out of the twenty-one low-income countries with data spend less than 4% of their GNP. In South Asia, several high-population countries continue to spend under or only just over 3% of their GNP on education. This appears to reflect low political commitment to education.
- Global wealth inequalities are mirrored by inequalities in education spending. In 2004, North America and Western Europe alone accounted for 55% of the world's spending on education but only 10% of the population aged 5 to 25. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 15% of 5- to 25-year-olds but just 2% of global spending. South and West Asia represents over one-quarter of the population and just 7% of spending.

International aid

- Commitments to basic education are stagnating. In 2006, for developing countries, they amounted to US\$5.1 billion, a little below the 2004 level. Half of all commitments to basic education came from just a handful of donors.
- Total aid for basic education for low-income countries in 2006 was US\$3.8 billion. The amount will have to be tripled to reach the estimated US\$11 billion required annually to finance a narrow range of goals in low-income countries.
- The Fast Track Initiative (FTI) is failing to galvanize additional bilateral donor support for EFA. Current commitments to its Catalytic Fund fall short of those required to meet financing requests in the pipeline. By 2010, countries with plans approved by the FTI could be facing a financing shortfall of US\$2.2 billion.
- An ambitious new agenda governing aid hopes to make aid more efficient and effective. To date progress is mixed: though some donors are willing to encourage national ownership, work through national systems and cooperate with other donors, others are more reticent.

Top policy recommendations

Meeting the EFA goals

Early childhood care and education

- **Strengthen the links** between education planning and child health provision, using cash transfer programmes, targeted health interventions and more equitable public spending in health sectors.
- **Prioritize early childhood education and care** in planning for all children, with incentives provided to include those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged.
- **Strengthen wider anti-poverty commitments** by tackling child malnutrition and improving public health systems, using innovative social welfare programmes which target poor households.

Universal primary education

- **Fix ambitious long-term goals** supported by realistic planning and sufficient medium- to long-term budgetary allocations to ensure progress in access, participation and completion in primary education.
- **Support equity** for girls, disadvantaged groups and underserved regions by setting clear targets for reducing disparities, backed by practical strategies for achieving more equitable outcomes.
- **Raise quality while expanding access** by focusing on smooth progression through school and better learning outcomes, increasing textbook supply and quality, strengthening teacher training and support, and ensuring that class sizes are conducive to learning.

Education quality

- **Strengthen policy commitments** to quality education and create effective learning environments for all students, including adequate facilities, well-trained teachers, relevant curricula and clearly identified learning outcomes. A focus on teachers and learning should be at the heart of this commitment.
- Ensure that all children attending primary school for at least four to five years **acquire the basic literacy and numeracy skills** that they need to develop their potential.
- Develop the capacity to **measure, monitor and assess education quality**, in areas that affect learning conditions (infrastructure, textbooks, class sizes), processes (language, instructional time) and outcomes.
- Revise existing policies and regulations to ensure that children have **sufficient instructional time** and that all schools minimize the gap between intended and actual instructional time.
- Participate in comparative regional and international **learning assessments** and translate lessons learned into national policy, and develop national assessments that best reflect each country's particular needs and goals.

Overcoming inequality – lessons for national governance reforms

- **Commit to the reduction of disparities** based on wealth, location, ethnicity, gender and other indicators for disadvantage. Governments should develop well-defined targets for reducing disparities and monitor progress towards their achievement.
- **Sustain political leadership** to reach education targets and tackle inequality through clear policy objectives and improved coordination within government through active engagement with civil society, the private sector and marginalized groups.
- **Strengthen policies for reducing poverty** and deep social inequalities that hinder progress towards education for all. Governments should integrate education planning into wider poverty-reduction strategies.
- **Raise quality standards** in education and work to ensure that disparities in learning achievement between regions, communities and schools are reduced.
- **Increase national education spending**, especially in developing countries that chronically underinvest in education.
- **Put equity at the centre** of financing strategies, in order to reach disadvantaged children, with more accurate estimates of the costs of reducing disparities and the development of incentives for reaching the most marginalized.
- **Ensure that decentralization** has an inbuilt commitment to equity through financing formulas that link resources to levels of poverty and deprivation in education.
- **Recognize that school competition and choice**, and private-public partnerships have their limits. If a public education system works poorly, the priority must be to fix it.
- **Strengthen the recruitment, deployment and motivation of teachers** to ensure that there are enough qualified teachers in all regions and schools, especially in remote and underserved communities.

Aid donors – delivering on commitments

- **Increase aid for basic education**, especially to low-income countries, by providing around US\$7 billion to cover current financing gaps in priority EFA areas.
- **Enlarge the group of donor countries** committed to providing aid to basic education, in order to ensure that the financial support for the EFA goals is sustainable.
- **Commit to equity in aid for education** by providing more funds to basic education in low-income countries. Several donors – including France and Germany – should urgently review their current aid allocations.
- **Get behind the Fast Track Initiative** and close the projected financing gap – estimated at US\$2.2 billion for 2010 – for countries with approved plans.
- **Improve aid effectiveness** and reduce transaction costs, as set out in the Paris Declaration, through greater alignment of aid behind national priorities, better coordination, increased use of national financial management systems and greater predictability in aid flows. ■