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Brief: Education in Africa

As leaders prepare for an education summit in Africa, recent figures from UNESCO's 2010 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (www.efareport.unesco.org) show that the region's children are still missing out.

Education in sub-Saharan Africa – Facts and Figures ¹

- Primary school enrolment in Africa has increased dramatically since the beginning of the millennium –from an average of 56% to 73% according to the most recent data. Many countries have made remarkable progress in getting more children, especially girls, into school.
- However, one in four children in sub-Saharan Africa does not go to school – a total of 32 million primary-school-age children. This is almost half (45%) of the global out-of-school population.
- Around 54% of children out of school are girls. In sub-Saharan Africa, almost 12 million girls may never enroll. Girls are getting left behind – fewer than half of the countries with data have equal numbers of girls and boys in school.
- While enrolment rates are rising, millions of children enter primary school only to drop out before completing a full primary cycle. Some 28 million pupils in sub-Saharan Africa drop out each year.
- Only one in three youths (34%) attends secondary school – the world's lowest level.
- About 38% of the adult population in sub-Saharan Africa, or 153 million adults, cannot read or write. Over 60% of these are women.
- A total of 1.2 million additional teachers are needed in the region to reach the internationally agreed goal of getting all children into primary school by 2015.
- Girls, the poor, those living in remote rural areas or speaking a minority language, and children living in conflict zones are often excluded from education. In Nigeria, a child spends approximately 6.5 years in school on average. A wealthy urban child averages around 10 years, while poor rural Hausa girls average less than six months in school.
- Aid levels to basic education in sub-Saharan Africa have dropped – from US\$1.72 billion in 2007 to \$1.65 billion in 2008. Taking into account rising enrolment in primary schools, spending per pupil has dropped by 7%

¹ All data (except aid) refers to 2007. Figures are taken from UNESCO's 2010 Education for All Global Monitoring Report. See www.efareport.unesco.org.

Some countries are moving ahead:

Ethiopia. Since the beginning of the millennium, Ethiopia has registered one of the fastest increases in primary education in sub-Saharan Africa – doubling enrolment to reach 71%. It has cut the number of out-of-school children by over 3 million. While the country still has a long way to go to having all children in school, it has made dramatic advances in improving access and tackling inequalities. One important factor has been an ambitious school construction programme in rural areas, which has spurred demand by reducing the distance to school and addressing security concerns for girls. Of the nearly 6,000 schools built since 1997, 85% are in rural areas. This has reduced distance to school and unlocked demand for education, especially for girls, as distance is a significant barrier to girls' participation in education. Textbook distribution has improved and content revised to be more relevant: schoolbooks are now published in twenty-two local languages.

United Republic of Tanzania. United Republic of Tanzania has made rapid progress towards making primary education universal. In 1999, only half of school-age children attended primary school. Today, nearly all children attend primary school. This is thanks to the abolition of primary school fees in 2001, increased public investment and measures to enhance education quality. Public education spending rose from 2.2% of GNP in 1999 to 7.1% in 2008. Between 2002 and 2004 some 30,000 new classrooms were built, and an additional 32,000 primary school teachers were recruited.

Benin. Benin has been among the world's fastest moving countries on primary enrolment, with the net enrolment ratio rising from 50% in 1999 to 80% in 2007. The gender gap also narrowed, going from just 68 girls to every 100 boys in school in 1999 to 84 girls in 2007. On current trends, Benin could meet the goals of reaching universal primary education by 2015. Maintaining the trend will be difficult, however. Rapid progress in enrolment has brought new policy challenges, such as raising completion rates, reducing regional disparities and tackling poverty.

Senegal. With some of the world's largest gender gaps, several countries in West Africa have adopted policies aimed at strengthening parity as part of the wider strategy for achieving universal primary education. In the space of one primary school generation, Senegal has moved from a gender parity index of 88 girls per 100 boys in 1999 to an equal number of girls and boys in school in 2007.