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SUMMARY OF PROGRESS TOWARDS EDUCATION FOR ALL

Working document prepared by UNESCO

**Tenth Meeting of the
High-Level Group on Education for All
Jomtien, Thailand**



กระทรวงศึกษาธิการ
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Summary of Progress towards Education for All¹

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for the Tenth High-Level Group Meeting on Education for All

I - Introduction: the Global Context 1990-2010

The vision of Jomtien was simple and powerful: **Every person - child, youth and adult - shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs.** In other words: **Education for All.** Although Universal Primary Education had long been part of the rhetoric of governments and international development agencies and advocated in their policies and programmes, the World Conference on Education for All held in Thailand in 1990 – attended by almost every country of the world, every development agency, and a large collection of national and international non-government agencies – made it both universal and official: education, not only in primary school but for young children, youth, and adults as well, really IS for all – not as a wish or a hope but as a fundamental right of humankind, globally endorsed in a range of international instruments in the decades prior to Jomtien.

This proved more easily said than done, of course. Between 1990 and 2000, many national EFA committees were formed and EFA action plans and programmes formulated, but these were often neither comprehensive nor credible and were inspired more by multilateral and bilateral donors than owned by the Ministries that were meant to implement them. Donors and some governments did increase their funding to education, data were collected a bit more systematically and reliably, and some progress was made towards the Jomtien goals – but to a large part, its vision was not realised.

The World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 reported on the decade's results (generally disappointing), tweaked the goals (with a greater focus on gender, quality, equity, and the “learning and life skills” needed for emerging knowledge societies), and attempted to reinforce the vision of Jomtien (but with less of its inspiring rhetoric). It did move the discourse from “basic needs” (“acceptable”, “essential”) to education as key to sustainable development in a globalising world and to the personalised knowledge and skills needed to live in such a world. But its most important outcomes dealt more with better implementation rather than different content. These included the following:

- **greater national ownership** of the EFA process and goals, with more serious national EFA plans (often more often embedded in longer-term education sector plans and therefore

¹ This report is a summary of regional reports on EFA progress from sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, and the Arab States. No regional report was written for Europe and North America. It has normally drawn data from the regional reports prepared by UNESCO Regional Offices for Education. However when making comparisons between regions, especially in the matrix table at the end of the report, the latest available data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics have been used, as it is the official United Nations source for international monitoring of education including EFA and the MDGs.

concerned with more than universal primary education), mechanisms for implementing them, and funds to finance them

- **more government and donor funding** for, and stronger donor coordination and harmonisation towards, “credible” EFA plans and programmes; the Fast Track Initiative has been especially important in this regard, providing funds both for developing and implementing these plans
- **the greater participation of non-government organisations (NGOs) at national, regional, and global levels in the achievement of EFA goals**; the Global Campaign for Education and its networks and programmes are a good example of such participation
- **a greater focus on monitoring and assessing progress towards the goals**. The last led both to a series of comprehensive and analytic Global Monitoring Reports and to more systematic efforts by both governments and NGOs, implemented in different ways in different regions of the world, to regularly assess whether and how the goals were being achieved (and if not, why not) and to build national capacity to do so.

II - Regional Contexts and Regional Coordination

As one might expect, the regional EFA reports prepared for this High-Level Group meeting reflect a mixed picture of progress and decline, success and failure – and above all, the increasingly complex nature of attaining the goals of Education for All. What was once imagined would be relatively linear progression towards, if not complete achievement of, the goals by 2015 was instead seriously disrupted by a variety of national, regional, and global events and circumstances. The regional reports describe both these and the regional contexts against which progress (or regression) towards the goals must be seen.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

In the period from 1990-2000 between the Jomtien and Dakar conferences, major challenges included the lack of expansion and improvement of early childhood care and education; high repetition and drop-out rates in primary education; difficulties in increasing educational opportunities for young people and adults; a lack of equity in the provision of education, leaving certain social groups at the margin of the educational system; functional illiteracy; and severe problems with learning achievement and the quality of education.

Since 2000, the region as a whole has shown steady if not remarkable economic growth and, partly as a result, improvements both in general living conditions and in educational access and completion. But the complexity of the region’s past and its resulting -- and enduring -- structural problems based on social, economic, ethnic, and gender inequalities remain as serious constraints to further progress, especially to the eradication of remaining inequities in educational provision and particularly in educational quality. The problems of the previous decade, in other words, have not gone away. Marginalised groups, especially indigenous groups and urban slum dwellers, remain at a serious disadvantage.

The importance of political and ideological concerns in many education systems of the region is also evident; this has been partly responsible for the uniquely comprehensive and common approach to

education development and EFA across Latin American and the Caribbean, by both governments and development agencies, as seen in regional plans and projects such as PRELAC (with its Secretariat at the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean), the Summit of America action plans, and the Educational Goals 2021 programme. During the last decade, therefore, the region was highly active in terms of developing international political agendas and common educational goals.

Specifically in regard to regional cooperation and donor support, a mix of two modalities has emerged, with donors and development agencies still pursuing bilateral, country-based programming but with increasing interest in implementing multi-country, “vertical”, and often issue-based sub-regional, regional, or even global programming, sometimes with the support of Middle-Income Countries now emerging as donors and development actors in their own right. Simultaneously has grown an increasing interest in other funding modalities such as South-South cooperation, endowment funding, public-private partnerships, and debt swaps.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

The largest (in both size and population) and most diverse region of the world, Asia and the Pacific has shown substantial economic growth over the last decade and more, even during the economic crisis of 2009-2010, with an increasing number of middle-income countries and ever fewer people living in poverty. Countries such as India and China are leading the way in terms of economic growth (although this and their sheer size distort the region’s aggregate statistics as a result). But serious income inequities remain within countries, leading to low school enrolment and completion among traditionally excluded groups such as girls, the extreme poor, and ethnic/linguistic minorities. Especially in Central Asia (where many countries show a decline in educational indicators) and in conflict-ridden countries such as Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, deprivation in regard to education, sanitation, and access to safe drinking water continue to plague millions of the region’s inhabitants.

Given the diversity of the region, there is no one programme or approach which comprehensively guides educational development. Some countries, in fact, have themselves become active development donors and others no longer rely on donor financing for their basic needs. And sub-regional bodies such as ASEAN, SEAMEO, SAARC, and the Pacific Forum are playing ever stronger roles in systematically analysing educational challenges and developing collaborative development programmes. The UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, with UNICEF and other EFA partners, has promoted collaboration throughout the EFA process, since even before Dakar – both regionally, with annual meetings of national EFA coordinators, and among EFA stakeholders at the national level. This was most notable through its support to ministry-driven mid-decade assessments of EFA in over 30 countries of the region.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

A recent review of “multi-dimensional” poverty, taking into account living standards, health, and education, indicates that while over half of the 1.75 billion people living in such poverty live in South Asia, national rates of such poverty are the highest in sub-Saharan Africa. There is a move in many countries to reduce these rates through institutional reform, better political and economic

governance, greater social stability, and more transparent management of public affairs; in some countries these efforts have led to sustained and more equitable economic growth. There is also progress in the number of democratic political transitions being made in the region, but some countries are moving in the opposite direction with contested elections (where they exist at all) and increasingly entrenched and corrupt regimes.

In many countries elaborate EFA national plans were developed post-Dakar, and some of them, heavily indebted but with credible EFA plans, have been supported by funds from the Fast Track Initiative and other bilateral and multilateral sources. The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) has long served as an important coordinating mechanism among countries and with multilateral organisations, donors, and NGOs in this process. This had led to considerable progress in reaching the EFA targets in some countries, including achieving gender parity, at least in primary school; expanding basic education to include additional years of secondary education; and finding a better balance between academic education and technical-vocational and training. The African Union's growing interest in education will only help in this process. But many serious challenges remain, notably inadequate infrastructure and teacher resources and persistent geographic and socio-economic disparities which leave many children (girls, the poor, ethnic/linguistic minorities) never enrolled in, or eventually pushed out of, school. A decline in the speed of achieving EFA goals in the last five years and fewer donor resources suggest that some very different approaches to EFA will be required in Africa after 2015.

THE ARAB STATES

Nowhere in the world, perhaps, is there so much change occurring – and so rapidly -- as in the Arab States, a region that is more diverse politically, culturally, socially, economically than it first appears. The difference between the Maghreb and the Gulf states is especially striking. The aggregate numbers in education have improved over time – with average levels of educational attainment in the region perhaps showing the fastest expansion in the world between 1990 and 2010. But governments of the region, particularly in the Maghreb, would be the first to admit that from a qualitative perspective – inequities in access, low levels of internal and external efficiencies and learning achievement, the mismatch between educational products and labour market needs – their education systems are not yet responding adequately to the demands of EFA.

This is seen as being particularly important given the increasing role that knowledge economies play in the development process and the slow but steady demographic changes in the region leading to large adolescent and youth populations and resulting pressure on job creation in a context of already high unemployment in the labour market. In some countries, also, there are severe financial constraints on meeting not only the remaining needs of basic education but also, and ever more so, the increased demand for upper secondary and higher education.

Mid-decade assessments carried out by many countries of the region, supported by the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Amman and other EFA partners, were instrumental in strengthening regional coordination.

III - What has been achieved: progress toward the EFA goals

Goal 1: Early childhood care and education (ECCE)

“Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.”

The Jomtien Declaration made it clear: “learning begins at birth” (not, as many assumed, when children enter primary school). This brought to the foreground the importance of the first years of a child’s life in determining her/his future

educational achievement and broader developmental outcomes.

Globally, considerable progress has been made in achieving the first Dakar goal. Early childhood well-being is improving, and child mortality and malnutrition rates have declined in many countries in all regions of the world (although many, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West, still have high rates). Enrolment in pre-school programmes has also expanded over the last decade as more and more governments have realised the positive impact which a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach to the health, nutrition, and cognitive and psycho-social development of young children can have on both educational efficiency and later social outcomes. Of particular significance is the growing body of research in the last decade that has shed light on both the critical importance and the cost-efficiency of ECCE (e.g., the brain development that occurs in the first years of a child’s life and ECCE’s high rate of return to investment).

Many countries, such as in Latin America and the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa, have developed ECCE policies, and more and more of these, including many in Asia and the Pacific, understand that these much be multi-sectoral and comprehensive in nature. Thus, gross enrolment ratios in pre-primary education are almost 50% or more in East Asia and the Pacific (49%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (68%) and have increased significantly since 2000 in South/West Asia (from 25% to 42%) and Central Asia (22% to 29%). But low rates and little improvement are seen in sub-Saharan Africa (from 12% to 17%) and the Arab States (from 16% to 19%).

The important parenthetical part of this goal, “especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children”, has been less successfully met. According to the 2011 Global Monitoring Report, among the sixty-eight countries with high child mortality rates, only nineteen will likely meet the MDG child mortality target of 2015, and one-third of all children under five years of age in developing countries suffer from stunting, a sign of poor nutritional status (2011 Global Monitoring Report Summary, page 9). Around the world, although gender parity in pre-school education has generally been achieved (except in the Arab States), expansion of ECCE programmes has largely been to the benefit of urban, well-to-do groups, thus both denying such programmes to the most disadvantaged children (e.g., of poor and rural families and those with disabilities) who have the most to gain from them and increasing the gap in school readiness between the rich and the poor and between urban and rural populations.

Ministries of Education, too, have been slow to assume the role they could and should assume in regard to the well-being of children aged 0-3. Such children are usually seen as the responsibility of other ministries -- health and/or social welfare, for example -- when, in fact, the education sector can also contribute significantly to their well-being. Education ministries, for example, can ensure that any adult education/literacy courses and even formal school curricula (especially in secondary

school) contain messages important to future parents in regard to the health and nutrition of both mothers and young children and the essential need for these children to receive stronger cognitive and psycho-social support and stimulation from birth.

The majority of countries in the world now have some kind of early childhood policy in place. But the regional EFA reports still reveal a considerable lack of understanding, at both national and community level, about the importance of ECCE. Thus, these policies, where they exist, frequently:

- are not based on **the systematic definition of, and the collection of data on, relevant indicators** of both child development and the ECCE sub-sector as a whole
- lack **information and data on the many non-formal, community- and private sector-based programmes** which are expanding in many countries; these include both good quality programmes for the elite and poor quality, often unsupervised and even unsafe programmes for the less advantaged
- lack a **comprehensive, coherent, multi-sectoral, and multi-partner ECCE framework and strategy** (across ministries, with the NGO and private sector) embedded in larger national development plans
- have no overall **policy coordinating mechanism** (such as the National ECCE Council in the Philippines) across the relevant, multiple partners; such a mechanism is essential for effective service delivery
- have no **systematic structure for training** the range of caregivers and pre-school teachers required for a good ECCE system (e.g., fewer than 10% of ECCE personnel in Africa are considered qualified) or assessing the system's strengths and weaknesses
- neglect not only **the health and nutritional needs of children aged 0-3** but also, due to lack of Ministry of Education interest, their need for cognitive and psycho-social development
- a serious lack of **funding**, at least from the government sector – which leads to the risk of unsupervised, private sector-dominated ECCE provision

The development by 2015 of comprehensive, integrated ECCE policies and related strategies and programmes which systematically respond to the above concerns is therefore an important priority for all countries of the world.

Goal 2: Universal Primary Education

“Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.”

Globally, progress has also been made in primary school enrolment and in some cases, in countries which define basic education as extending beyond primary school (largely in Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia and the Pacific), in secondary school enrolment as

well. This growth in enrolment since Jomtien has been unprecedented and reflects not only additional resources from national governments and development agencies but also a range of educational innovations and reforms such as the abolition of school fees in several African countries; in other words, the world knows much more now about what is needed to get children in school and keep them there. Thus, the absolute number of children of primary school age **not** in school

(primary or secondary) has decreased markedly over the last decade, and while the net enrolment rates of some countries have stagnated or even declined, many others have reached rates of 95% or even 98%. South and West Asia, for example, halved the size of its out-of-school population between 2000 and 2008.

With a 2008 global NER for primary school at 90% and most sub-regions at around 95%, only the Arab States (86%) and sub-Saharan Africa (77%) are below the global rate, but even these regions have shown an increase in enrolment over the last decade (e.g., 12% in the Arab States) despite their common problems of rapid population growth, large pools of out-of-school children, conservative social attitudes and prejudices, civil strife, gender and ethnic divides, and poor educational infrastructure.

But these generally positive aggregate figures mask several problems:

- **a need to directly address the barriers and needs of remaining out-of-school groups;** the closer countries move towards UPE, the greater difficulty of reaching the last of the unreached. With current population growth as it is, this could mean more children out of school in 2015 than there are today. In response to this, many countries, such as Lao PDR, Timor Leste, and Pakistan, are developing serious inclusive education policies, strategies and action plans.
- **high repetition and drop-out (or, more accurately, “push-out”) rates.** This occurs first in the early grades in many countries (e.g., according to the regional report, an average rate of 9.1% in the first grade in over 30 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean), often due to children not being ready for school (with no pre-school experience, for example) or to the school not being ready for the child (e.g., teaching in a language the child does not understand). But it also can occur in later grades, as older children leave for family work or less able children are nudged out of school, or in the critical transition to what is often a more expensive, less accessible, and often less relevant secondary school. This means that in some countries a large percentage of children never complete primary education. In Africa, for example, of the children who enter primary school, only 64% complete it, and 10 million children drop out of primary school ever year.
- a growing concern about **the sheer lack of teachers** needed to achieve EFA, especially in Africa, and their capacity to provide education of good quality given what are often high rates of absenteeism and low levels of essential competencies
- **disparities within nations in access and achievement** between girls and boys, urban and rural locations, socio-economic classes, majority and minority ethnic/linguistic groups, and the “abled” and those with disabilities. Even high national NERs can hide large differences between the “included” and the “excluded” within the society. Household data from the Arab States, for example, indicate that children from the poorest 20% of households are 3.2 times more likely to be out of primary school than those from the wealthiest 20% - in some nations, almost 5 times – and even more so for girls (UNICEF 2005, Progress for Children). Such figures confirm the concern that education often reproduces and reinforces wider social discrimination and economic and political disparities. And since getting the excluded into school generally costs more per child than those already in school, ministries have few incentives to work towards a genuinely inclusive system; so thus...
- **the view that 98%, or even 95%, is “good enough”** and that therefore EFA Goal 2 has been achieved when, in fact, that final percentage must be enrolled in and helped to complete basic

education if this essential EFA goal is to be reached. This requires an increased commitment to equity through targeted plans, strategies, and programmes linked to specific budgets to address the education needs of the excluded.

- **the perceived lack of relevance of school.** It is no longer enough to simply make spaces in school available. There must be strong positive incentives to ensure that disadvantaged families appreciate the importance and relevance of their children attending school and then explicit efforts to find those not enrolled and get them into school and succeed there.

As reported in the regional EFA reports, the decade has provided ever clearer evidence of what works at increasing enrolment and completion rates in basic education:

- **more and better ECCE programmes**, especially those which are child-centred, play-based, and provided in mother tongue
- **greater emphasis on the quality of the early years of learning** (i.e., much more effort and resources put into early literacy and numeracy)
- **the reduction and even elimination of school fees and other costs** along with the provision of stipends and other special incentives for the very poor
- **a larger percentage of the ministry's budget devoted to basic education** (e.g., for infrastructure and teacher professional development and remuneration)
- **the reduction of repetition rates**, which often lead to higher drop-out rates, through such policies as automatic promotion accompanied by serious remedial support to those who are failing
- **special efforts directed at remote, rural populations and the urban poor** through programmes such as satellite schools, multi-grade teaching, and non-formal approaches which are accredited by the government and recognised by the labour market
- **the greater and more genuine inclusion of learners with disabilities** into regular classrooms with specialised support before and during this process
- in general, **the development of schools which are more child-friendly** – not only academically effective but also healthy and protective, genuinely inclusive, responsive to issues of gender, and encouraging of student, parent, and community participation.

Goal 3: Learning and Skills for Young People and Adults

“Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.”

Various defined in the regional reports as covering formal secondary education (as in the report from Latin America and the Caribbean), life skills, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), skills

development, continuing education, lifelong learning, and/or the learning needs of youth and adults, progress towards this goal is difficult to assess. The reports do show the following:

- **Progress towards this goal is essential**, for individual well-being, social stability, and national development. Youth unemployment in the Arab States, for example, reached 30% in 2006, and 90% of youth in Africa between 15 and 24 years of age enter the informal labour sector without any vocational preparation. As a result, existing local labour markets simply do not have the capacity to absorb this number – leading to increasing (and increasingly dangerous) under-

employment and unemployment and, potentially, greater social and political instability. Countries are also having to carefully balance higher education provision and the needs of the labour market. While in many countries expanding education and labour markets are leading to increased demand for higher education and high skills, in others, economic and demographic contraction has led to an oversupply of graduates with skills unsuited to the local labour market.

- **School curricula now include many more life, livelihood, and living skills than in the past** – from education for sustainable development to HIV and AIDS prevention, computer skills, entrepreneurship, human rights and peace education, disaster risk reduction, and international education. More non-formal Community Learning Centres, especially in Asia, are also inserting these skills development courses into their programmes. The challenge, of course, is to include such a wide range of issues in the curriculum while guaranteeing that basic (and usually examinable) subject matter is adequately covered.
- **Secondary school enrolment is increasing.** In Africa, for example, the enrolment rate for lower secondary education increased from 38% in 2000 to 51% in 2008, but attendance and completion rates are still too often linked to factors such as SES, ethnicity, sex, and location; in many countries, girls continue to be disadvantaged at this level.
- Given the larger number of children entering secondary education with subsequently higher aspirations in regard to future work, **education systems are more and more concerned about the expansion and nature of skills development** in general and technical and vocational education specifically. But many LDCs cannot afford comprehensive TVET programmes, and in Africa, for example, the rate of students entering technical and vocational education, as opposed to general academic education, has actually decreased. This is in part because TVET is seen as expensive and is not funded by donors even though TVET in a service-driven knowledge society may be no more expensive than general education.
- **The particular educational and economic context and needs of a country must be taken more carefully into account in the development of skills development programmes.** This includes, for example, whether TVET is provided in specialised schools or is integrated into general education, what kinds of skills are taught (from basic survival skills to post-industrial skills for knowledge-intensive services), and the extent to which governments try to ensure some kind of skills development programmes for its most excluded populations.
- **The role of non-formal education (NFE) in skills development must be expanded,** especially to reach those unable to take advantage of more formal programmes. But such NFE must be of similar quality to formal education, and the certification it provides must be recognised by the government and potential employers.
- **The articulation between what industries and businesses (both large and small) need and what training providers deliver is weak.** Thus, for example, systematic workplace training is almost completely absent in developing countries and is one of the biggest differences between education and training in developed and developing countries.
- **More effort is going towards establishing standard competencies and national qualification frameworks in TVET,** and some regions, as in Africa, are developing regional frameworks and therefore encouraging labour mobility across the region. Much more progress in the development of these frameworks, however, must be achieved.

Given the burgeoning youth populations in many countries of the world – and the frequently narrowing and down-sizing of labour markets -- ever more systematic but also innovative approaches to skills development will be needed by 2015 and beyond.

Goal 4: Adult Literacy

“Achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.”

Literacy rates have also increased around the world, more substantially, of course, in populations aged 15-24 than among older age groups. As more children complete a formal education, they leave school (at least partly)

literate. But the absolute number of illiterates remains persistently and inexcusably high, especially in countries of South and West Asia, sub-Saharan Africa (with over 150 million illiterates), and the Arab States (where the total illiterate population actually **increased** by one million in the last decade). Outside Africa illiteracy is concentrated in particular countries and in particular groups of excluded people. Reaching these illiterates – many of whom, such as women, suffer from entrenched biases against education or have special needs related to extreme poverty, disability, and language – is not a problem easily solved in the next few years especially given the lack of innovative responses to illiteracy and the general disinterest in, and lack for funding for, literacy programmes by governments and development agencies alike.

But even good literacy rates must be viewed with caution, for two reasons:

- **Official literacy rates are often inflated**, still largely based on self-report. Seldom are ministries willing or able to carry out systematic, nationally representative sample surveys of literacy performance (reading, writing, comprehension). Where they have, the results indicate literacy rates 20%-30% lower than the official figures.
- **The definition of functional literacy, by necessity, keeps changing** – and changing faster than the quality of attempts to measure it. Assessments made which are sensitive to the literacy or literacies needed to function in a particular society show that even very developed countries have high rates of illiteracy.

The UN Literacy Decade (2003-2012), although not sufficiently supported by either national governments or the international development agency community, has usefully expanded the discourse about literacy to consider its contextual nature (e.g., multiple literacies) and the importance of literate environments and post-literacy to ensure that literacy, once gained, is sustained. It has also reinforced efforts to reduce illiteracy through a variety of programmes designed to:

- **reinforce the capacity** of literacy/NFE planners and facilitators
- **develop more systematic and comprehensive national NFE strategies** with a heavy focus on functional literacy
- **increase the percentage of ministry budgets** developed to literacy and NFE
- **promote greater flexibility in the promotion of mother tongues** for both initial and adult literacy

- **use a broader range of ICT approaches** and continuing education programmes in sustaining literacy
- **link literacy programmes much more closely to local contexts** and individual needs.

Despite these efforts, illiteracy persists and, from a functional point of view, is even increasing in many parts of the world. Given the impact of literate families and environments on the quality of education received by learners around the world, more comprehensive, innovative, and better-financed literacy programmes are needed in the future.

Goal 5: Gender parity and equality

“Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary schooling by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.”

Many countries, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia and the Pacific, have reached gender parity in accessing and completing pre-school and primary school, even across place of residence, income levels, and ethnicity. In fact, East Asia and the Pacific are

reaching gender parity at all levels of education. Other countries, however, especially in the Arab States and sub-Saharan Africa (the latter with a GPI for primary school of 0.91 and secondary school, 0.84) still lag behind largely both for economic and cultural/religious reasons. In general, girls continue to be never enrolled in school or taken out of school because of early marriage, pregnancy, violence in school, the belief that public school values deny traditional ones, and their family’s estimate of the usefulness of school to their daughters compared to their sons. Even if parity is reached in terms of enrolment, the outcomes of girls in terms of learning achievement are often lower than that for boys.

Again, we now have a better idea of what can ameliorate at least some of these concerns, including, among other actions:

- **schools built closer to homes** and with safe, equal, and sanitary facilities
- **family or student stipends** (or extra school food rations) for the enrolment of girls
- **less biased and stereotyped teaching-learning materials** and methods
- **local advocacy and sensitisation** concerning the value of education for girls and their families.

But the gender parity issue as a disadvantage to girls, while still generally valid, is becoming ever murkier, especially at secondary level (and especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, southern Africa, and a growing number of countries in Southeast Asia), as boys are becoming more and more the unschooled and the underachieving. There are many reasons for this: male-unfriendly school environments and curricula, the perceived irrelevance of schooling to their likely future, and their family’s need for their labour either at home or in the workplace. Because the contexts for such low performance are so different, the responses must also be context-specific.

Little of the discussion around gender, unfortunately, revolves around the larger issue of gender equality, which the Millennium Development Goals handle more comprehensively than the EFA targets. Inequality between men and women in career tracks and income (inside and outside of

education), gender-biased education budgets, textbooks which continue to stereotype girls/women and boys/men – all of these confirm the need to move beyond numerical parity to the larger issue of equality. Achieving true gender equality therefore means questioning many assumptions about how subjects are taught and what teaching materials are used.

Goal 6: Education Quality

“Improving every aspect of the quality of education and ensuring the excellence for all, so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all learners, especially in literacy, numeracy, and essential life-skills.”

With more and more children included in school, at least according to official figures, even more attention is being paid to ensuring that pupils are “included” in **learning** – in other words, that they are receiving an education of good quality. Irrelevant curricula, untrained or unmotivated teachers, the use of a teaching language which the pupils do not understand, poor and unsafe facilities, and/or the lack of textbooks, among other factors, can discourage many children from ever enrolling in school, push them out of school, or leave them in school but not learning – which shows again the close link between access and quality. In many sub-Saharan African countries, for example, 40% of children who finish five years of primary school cannot read or write and lack basic competencies for life and for the world of work.

The frameworks used to analyse quality are many and still increasing. But some clarity is being reached about what constitutes quality and how to achieve it. The regional EFA reports focus on several systemic issues in this regard. This includes the following trends:

- **seeing “basic education” as encompassing 9-10 years** and designing such an education in a more holistic, coherent, and continuous manner
- **ensuring that the end of primary school (and any examination that goes with it) does not become a barrier** to further education
- **grounding educational content and methods** firmly in traditional (rather than colonial) contexts and languages
- **developing systems that are more flexible and context-specific** than is currently the case.

More specifically, the reports focus on the following issues:

- **the teacher as the core of quality.** This view is leading to a much more comprehensive and systematic approach to preparing the new – and developing the current – teachers needed to achieve EFA. This begins from the more careful selection of teacher candidates, through better quality initial teacher education, deployment to where good teachers are needed the most, serious induction and probation processes, and continuing professional development. But the success of this process depends on ensuring that teaching is once again seen as a profession of “first choice” rather than “last chance”, and this requires raising both the status of the profession (e.g., through higher standards of qualification and certification) and teacher salaries and other benefits.
- **greater accountability of the school for its outcomes**, not only **up** the system to the local education office and, ultimately, the Ministry of Education but also, and increasingly so, **out** to parents of its pupils and the larger community surrounding the school. This implies a greater

role for the community in school-based management, school self-assessment, and the development of school improvement plans.

- **more clearly defined learning outcomes.** Across many regions, curriculum and textbook development processes are being reformed so that the content of the education provided includes not only basic skills but also key competencies such as problem-solving, communication, and teamwork. This includes a range of more values-based content, both old (education related to peace, international understanding, life skills, morality, democracy, citizenship, etc.) and new (education for sustainable development, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation).
- **more comprehensive competency standards for students (and also teachers) and more accurate and useful achievement assessment processes.** All regions of the world, except Asia, are moving towards the common, cross-national definition of desired student competencies and toward clearer systems of student assessment and system evaluation. But the domination of school-leaving examinations or school entrance examinations as the sole requirement for entrance into higher levels of education, especially for elite private schools, persists. This, in turn, skews the system even more towards teaching only “to the test” and private tutoring, and this, in turn, reinforces the gap between the rich and the poor.
- **non-classroom factors.** One important progression from Jomtien to Dakar was a clearer focus on a broader definition of quality, beyond classroom inputs, processes, and outputs. This has led to a greater concern, as reflected, for example, in the Latin American and Caribbean report, for non-classroom determinants of quality such as school climate and harmonious, positive human relationships within schools.

Other Issues

Financing. In general, there is some evidence that larger percentages of national income and national budgets are now flowing into the education sector – 4.9% of the former and about 15% of the latter across the Arab States, for example (in 2007) and an increase of the share of national income among low income countries from 2.9% to 3.8%. But despite (or perhaps because of) the general trend toward the decentralisation of governance and financing in many countries of the world, not enough is being done to target these increases to those areas and groups most excluded from education. This could be done, for example, by increasing per-pupil allocations to districts with the worst education indicators and developing extra and remedial programmes for those children most excluded from learning.

Of equal concern is the stagnation of development agency financing of education due partly to the global financial crisis of the last decade and changing donor priorities.

Finally, teachers’ salaries continue to be a major issue in least developed countries, especially in Africa where in many countries they can make up 70% to 90% of running costs and form an important brake on other investments for education.

Management and governance. Limits in government capacity continue to hamper the transparent, efficient, and equitable implementation of education programmes and budgets. In some contexts, this leads to non-state providers, such as NGOs and both profit and non-profit private providers, playing a larger role in education. Many of these for-profit schools, unfortunately, promise more

than they can deliver, which both weakens the public system and leads to the waste of scarce family resources devoted to education. Decentralisation is meant to be one solution to this problem, but this requires clearer definitions of what level of education does what, a strong national framework in which decentralisation occurs, and adequate preparation, training, and financial support for this decentralisation process.

IV - Toward EFA in 2015 and Beyond: Remaining Challenges and Commitments to be Renewed

The regional EFA reports provide very useful data and insightful analyses about progress towards the EFA goals of 2015 – and about the challenges that remain. Achieving (or getting much closer to) these goals in the last four years before 2015 will require one final and substantial political and financial commitment. In addition to this, however, there are some areas which deserve particular attention in the few years remaining until 2015 and especially in any renewal of commitment, and a refocusing of attention, to EFA post-2015. These include the following:

Exclusion. A critical issue now and for the future is the extent to which Ministries of Education take seriously those learners still excluded from school and from literacy programmes. This demands greater attention to net **non-enrolment** rates and the understanding that getting 95% or 98% of children enrolled in school does **not** achieve EFA. The 5% not in school (even if these data can be believed) represent many millions of children destined for a life of continuing exclusion and disadvantage.

In other words, what reforms are Ministries willing to undertake toward more inclusive education (e.g., use of mother tongue for early literacy, expansion of ECCE programmes, innovations directed at the more remote population groups, the systematic inclusion of learners with disabilities in regular classrooms) and at what cost in order to get ever closer to genuinely universal basic education? As the Asia and Pacific region report suggests, there must be a sharper focus on addressing marginalisation by an “increased commitment to equity through targeted plans, strategies and programmes clearly linked to budgets” and strong EMIS capacity especially focusing on marginalised groups.

Transition. Important transitions in education – from the home or pre-school to primary school, from primary to secondary school, and, in general, from school to work – are often not given the attention they deserve. These include:

- **Transition to primary school.** Children without some kind of pre-school experience (preferably interactive and play-based rather than academic in nature) have less success in completing primary school, and primary schools which do not adapt to the needs of new pupils (in areas such as language of instruction) have less success in retaining them. The increasingly accepted definition of early childhood as including children aged 0-8 (which only the African report reflects) compels ministries to worry more about this critical transition and therefore expand ECCE programmes; ensure their concern for the physical and socio-emotional, as well as academic, development of children; improve the quality of early learning; and guarantee greater success in making their students both literate and numerate. This means that the early

grades need lower student-teacher ratios and teachers trained specifically to respond to the cognitive and psycho-social needs of young children.

- **Transition to secondary school.** Because in most countries of the world, due to the reduction or elimination of school fees and improvements in educational quality. EFA has “worked”, there are more and more children leaving primary school. But these children find it increasingly difficult to make the transition to what are inevitably more expensive and often more distant and less welcoming secondary schools. Figuring out how to provide secondary-level education to groups usually excluded from such education will become an ever large challenge for ministries.
- **Transition to the world of work.** As more students complete some level of secondary education, they (and their families) will expect this to lead to “a good job”. And in many countries of the world, especially in those labelled as “failed states”, up to 40% of the population are under the age of 15. In a decade of economic crisis, economies simply cannot keep up with the demand for work which such statistics imply. This is not a problem which Ministries of Education alone can solve, but they will have to reform their systems in a fundamental way in order to contribute to its solution.

Data accuracy and data inflation. Despite considerable improvements in educational management information systems around the world – in the validity of their data, the timeliness of their reports, and the depth of their analysis -- serious problems remain. Decentralising education systems, often having lost both “carrots” (positive incentives) and “sticks” (negative sanctions) through which they previously could compel the timely (if not always accurate) collection of administrative data, now find it difficult to know what is really happening in schools and classrooms at the bottom of system. Doubts about literacy rates, inflated through self-report rather than performance testing, are being joined by doubts about official school enrolment rates, now often the basis of large per capita block grants, as opposed to school attendance rates. Both ministries of education and supporting development agencies therefore need to exercise more caution in using official data to declare EFA victories and to redouble their efforts to get more accurate and reliable data on what is happening in their systems.

Learning. More and more evidence, from international comparative studies such as TIMSS and PISA and from national assessments, is revealing truly shocking data about the extent to which children are **not** learning in school. While more children are being included in school, many also are being excluded from learning what they want to and need to learn. A 2006 study among 16 Latin American countries showed that out of four levels of proficiency, 23.3% of sixth grade students had not reached at least level II in language and 19.4% in mathematics. In a later PISA study (2009) none of the eight LAC countries scored above any of the OECD countries. In Qatar, for the 2007 TIMSS study, 84% of the tested eighth graders scored below the low international benchmark in mathematics and 71% in science. Much greater attention must therefore be paid to what kind of learning is occurring (or not) in classrooms and not only to how many children are sitting in them.

Early learning. It is more and more understood that much of this failure to learn begins in the early years of school, with large classes, overly academic curricula, poor teachers, and a language many children cannot understand -- and even before, back to pre-school (if any exists), the context of the home and family, and even to the health and nutrition of the expectant mother. It is very difficult to make up for these negative circumstances in the later years of primary school. Even greater effort is

therefore needed to ensure that children are ready to learn when they enter school and that schools are ready to respond to the wide variety of individual needs and backgrounds that their students bring with them.

Sustainability. The regional reports say little about the increasing incidence of conflict and natural disasters and their impact on education (in some cases, setting back the progress of EFA by years) – although the importance of conflict in this regard has been recognised by the 2011 Global Monitoring Report’s focus on this theme. The reports say even less about what education systems must do to sustain themselves and be resilient in the face of – and to prevent, prepare for, mitigate the impact of, respond to, and recover from – such difficult circumstances. Ensuring that education systems understand and implement their role in both conflict reduction/response and disaster risk management is of increasing importance.

V - Beyond 2015: Recommendations for the Future of EFA

The world of 2015 will be a very different one from that of Jomtien in 1990 and even of Dakar in 2000. The nature and extent of the educational content that must be learned, the methods by which this is delivered, and the labour markets for which it is meant to be suited will be – must be -- all very different. Only one thing, perhaps, is certain, extrapolating from current trends: unless much more energy, many more resources and more innovative approaches are devoted to the issue of equity, the gap between the haves and have-nots, the reached and the unreached, the included and the excluded will only increase.

So what might the EFA agenda (and the MDGs as well) look like post-2015? The difference between the Jomtien goals and the Dakar goals was one of degree – higher numerical targets, a bit more explicit focus on intractable issues such as gender and complex ones such as quality and life skills. Given the rapid changes now occurring in the world (and the fact that some needed changes are **not** occurring), **the difference between the Dakar goals and the EFA agenda post-2015 must be one not of degree but of kind.**

The inspirational rhetoric of Jomtien and its focus on education’s broad-based contribution to both the economic and social development of nations must be recaptured and redirected toward a very different world and increasingly complex challenges. In this process, development partners must be even more concerned with increasing their co-ordination and facilitating, rather than controlling, national EFA processes and agenda.

The authors of the post-2015 EFA agenda should therefore consider paying much greater attention to the following:

- **expanding the role of the Ministry of Education in regard to children aged 0-3**, in collaboration with other ministries and agencies, to guarantee not only better quality and expanded ECCE programmes but also programmes which will have an impact on the early health, nutrition, and cognitive and psycho-social development of the very young
- **ensuring more resources and more innovative approaches are focused on the first two years of primary school** – smaller classes, better teachers, specialists in early learning and literacy,

the reform of language-in-education policies – therefore helping to ensure early success and the likelihood of greater achievement in education

- in support of this, **implementing earlier and more comprehensive assessments** both of learning achievement and of character development so that both average student achievement increases and specialised, individualised attention can be paid to those most at risk of being excluded from learning
- **raising the quality of teachers**, with much more serious attention and more resources devoted to them throughout their career, from recruitment through training to deployment, induction, continuing professional development, and the enhancement of their professional social status and economic rewards
- **looking much more seriously at alternative forms of educational delivery**, such as the still inadequately explored options presented by new innovations in ICT
- **reforming the nature and content of secondary education**, to make it a more seamless extension from good quality, child-friendly primary schools; more accessible to children from presently excluded population groups; and more able to make its graduates employable and therefore ensure a smoother transition to a wider range of labour market opportunities
- above all, **ensuring a greater focus on equity** – by urban-rural location, sex, ethnicity and language, socio-economic status, and ability/disability. EFA targets can no longer focus only on raising national aggregates (although this is still important) but must also promote a quantifiable reduction (e.g., by 50%) in existing gaps (in NER, literacy rates, gender parity, teacher qualifications, and, ultimately, student achievement) between sexes, the highest and lower quintiles of SES, ethnic groups, and administrative districts and urban-rural locations.

Regional Summaries of Progress towards the EFA Goals

Goal	Latin America and the Caribbean	Asia and the Pacific	Sub-Saharan Africa	Arab States
1	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> incorporation of ECCE in almost all nations' laws and policies a GER for pre-primary education of over 65% with gender parity <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> significant enrolment gaps between the highest and lowest income quintiles and urban/rural locations lack of trained pre-primary teachers 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 49% GER for pre-primary education, with gender parity a growing consensus that policies for young children should be multi-sectoral and comprehensive <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> under-5 mortality and malnutrition still high in many countries low NER in many countries inadequate coordination and financing of ECCE programmes 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a small increase in GER for pre-primary education a regional commitment to ECCE by the African Union many countries with ECCE policies <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> high malnutrition and under-5 mortality rates poor quality of ECCE teachers lack of indicators and accurate data on the ECCE sector large disparities by income, ethnicity, and residence 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> some improvement in pre-primary enrolments but regional average low some countries with national ECCE strategies <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> lack of awareness of the importance of ECCE and of government support regional and sub-national disparities still strong with limited service for marginalised groups poor quality of teacher training in many countries
2	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 95% adjusted NER in primary education with gender parity <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a generally low adjusted net intake rate little change in NER since 2000 high grade 1 repetition (6.7 %) continuing inequities between income quintiles and for rural areas and ethnic groups 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> stable high adjusted NER, with gender parity in East Asia and the Pacific. South/West Asia, increasing adjusted NER. more countries with a strong commitment to inclusive education, including lower secondary education <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> continuing barriers of sex, ethnicity, ability, remoteness, and poverty reducing enrolment and completion rates in some large countries and in disadvantaged areas of almost all countries 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> considerable increase in the regional NER in the last decade but with great variety across sub-regions reforms such as the abolition of school fees helping to increase enrolment <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> many countries still far from achieving the goal population growth, civil strife, and economic stagnation making the situation more difficult 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12% increase in primary education NER in last decade (1999-2008) <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> slow progress in raising the NER with six million children still out of primary school few opportunities for children with disabilities large disparity between the highest and lowest income quintiles and urban-rural areas population increases, entrenched cultural biases, civil strife, and gender discrimination still affecting enrolment and completion

Goal	Latin America and the Caribbean	Asia and the Pacific	Sub-Saharan Africa	Arab States
3	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • average 7.8% increase in secondary NER from 2000-2008 <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • less than half of the 15-19 age group finish secondary education • continuing inequities between income quintiles and for rural areas and ethnic groups 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • progress made in skills development policies in a broader framework of lifelong learning • many more life and livelihood skills included in formal and NF education • TVET programmes expanding, often related to qualification frameworks <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low TVET participation in LDCs • limited workplace learning available • weak relationships between trainers and employers 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • general increase in secondary school enrolment • progress towards a regional qualifications framework <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • percentage enrolled in TVET lower now than in 2000 for lower secondary school • most youth enter the labour market with no training and many cannot be absorbed by it 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new subjects focused on life skills, functional literacy, and income generation introduced into the curricula <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high youth unemployment and a stagnant labour market • limited access to non-formal education and training programmes (with the latter often not officially recognised) • curricula still outdated for current and future labour markets
4	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • major improvements in literacy in the 15-24 age group <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • functional illiteracy still a major problem as the concept of literacy changes in modern society and workplaces 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • literacy rates generally improved • increased understanding of the importance of multiple literacies and a literate environment <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • still high illiteracy in South and West Asia • lack of innovative, diverse approaches to reaching the remaining illiterate groups 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some innovations and advocacy now seen (e.g., with the support of UNESCO's LIFE programme) <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the low status of, and budget for, NFE and literacy • the lack of innovative approaches such as ICT, mother tongue, and links to income generation • the weak capacity of literacy personnel and partnerships 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adult literacy rate increase by 5% points in last decade <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • total illiterate population increase of 1 million in last decade • female illiteracy, especially in rural areas, a serious problem • post-literacy and continuing education programmes needed

Goal	Latin America and the Caribbean	Asia and the Pacific	Sub-Saharan Africa	Arab States
5	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> gender parity achieved in primary education and literacy <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> males disadvantaged in secondary education 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> close to gender parity in all levels of education <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> boys at an increasing disadvantage, especially in secondary education education system career tracks and textbooks still gender-biased 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> expansion of primary education, with higher gender parity but less progress at the secondary level <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> persistent cultural traditions and practices against girls' education discrimination within the education system and schools not friendly to, or healthy for, girls 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> two-fifth of the countries meeting the 2005 parity goals in primary education <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> only slow progress in parity in secondary education very low gender parity rates in TVET programmes and literacy
6	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> many countries showing progress in raising teacher qualifications <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> international evaluations of achievement for primary and secondary education demonstrating low levels in reading, mathematics, and science 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> general trend to upgrade qualifications needed by teachers at all levels general reduction in pupil/teacher ratios <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> teacher training, career paths, and salaries still inadequate no common regional standards for examinations and learning assessments developing countries lagging far behind in international learning achievement surveys 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> commitment to expand basic education to 9-10 years and see it as a more coherent cycle ongoing attempts to make the curricula more relevant to African culture and economic conditions <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> large percentages of school leavers unable to read or write persistent influence of colonial systems and biases at the expense of African models (e.g., language of instruction) poor linkage with labour markets, both traditional and modern large percentage of education budgets spent on teacher salaries 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> greater general understanding and analysis of the status of educational quality in the region and the need to take a comprehensive approach to increasing it some countries supporting education reforms towards this goal <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> low scores in all subjects in international achievement surveys lack of quality standards, qualified teachers, and synergy between public and private sectors