



Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all

Afghanistan: Fact Sheet

Most EFA goals are likely to be missed by 2015

The pace of progress towards universal primary education, lower secondary education and youth literacy is too slow, particularly for the disadvantaged. For this Report, an attempt was made to identify which countries lacking data are likely to have more than 1 million children out of school, using estimates of the primary net attendance rate from household surveys carried out between 2008 and 2011. These calculations add six countries to the eight known to have more than 1 million children out of school. Afghanistan is among these.

Despite improvements over the decade, Afghanistan has the highest level of gender disparity in primary education in the world with only 71 girls in primary school for every 100 boys. It is likely to remain very far from the target of gender parity in primary education by 2015.

No girls were in secondary school in 1999 in the country. By 2011, the female gross enrolment ratio rose to 34%, which meant there were only 55 girls in secondary school for every 100 boys.

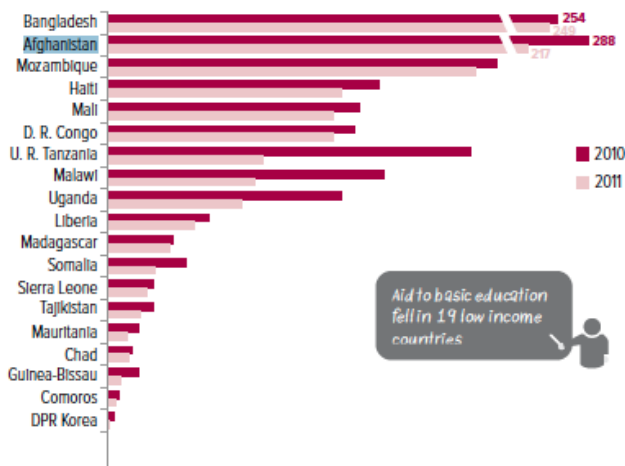
Trends in financing Education for All

New EFA goals after 2015 should set a target for all countries to allocate at least 6% of GNP to education and at least 20% of total government expenditure on education. In Afghanistan, education accounts for 3.5% of the GNP and 16.7% of the total government expenditure.

Afghanistan was expected to increase its spending on education by 15% in real terms between 2010 and 2012, although the share of the education budget as a proportion of government spending was likely to remain below 20%.

Aid to basic education fell in 19 low income countries between 2010 and 2011

Total aid to basic education in low income countries, 2010 and 2011



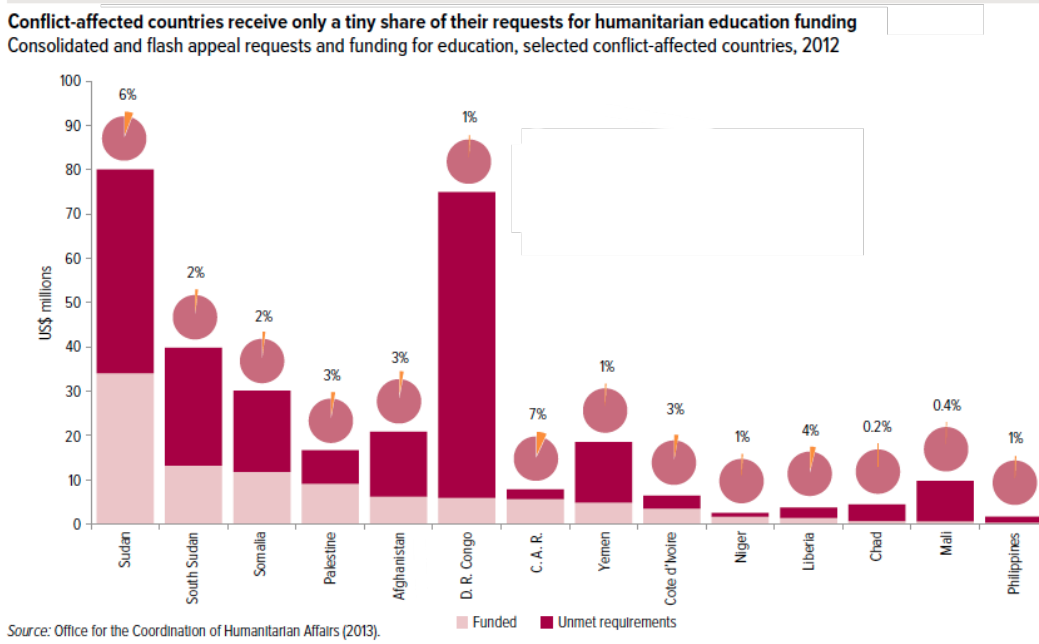
Low income countries, which only receive around one-third of aid to basic education, witnessed a larger decrease in aid to basic education than middle income countries. In Afghanistan, total aid to basic education in the country fell from \$US288 million in 2010 to \$US217 million in 2011.

While annual fluctuations in aid may not be uncommon, such changes make it difficult for countries to plan. Given that a large proportion of education spending is on teacher salaries, sudden reductions in aid can mean that teachers are not paid on time, or that teachers leaving the profession are not replaced, seriously harming the quality of education. Part of this decline is due to the United States decreasing its spending to the country.

Humanitarian aid appeals neglect education needs

With half the world’s out-of-school children residing in conflict-affected countries such as Afghanistan, education in these countries should be a priority for donors. Recognizing this, the UN Secretary-General’s Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) set a target of 4% for education’s share of short-term humanitarian aid. While this sounds modest, it is unfortunately far beyond the actual share in 2012: 1.4%, down from 2.2% in 2009. Education is the sector receiving the smallest proportion of requests for humanitarian aid, and just 26% of the amounts requested are actually covered.

The funds requested for the education sector in Afghanistan’s consolidated appeal were the lowest for any sector and, despite this, less than quarter of the request was met. As a share of total funding, education received just 3% of the Afghanistan humanitarian appeal.

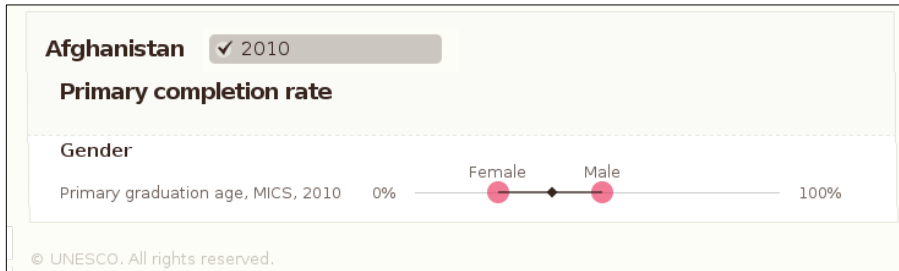


Wide inequalities in education

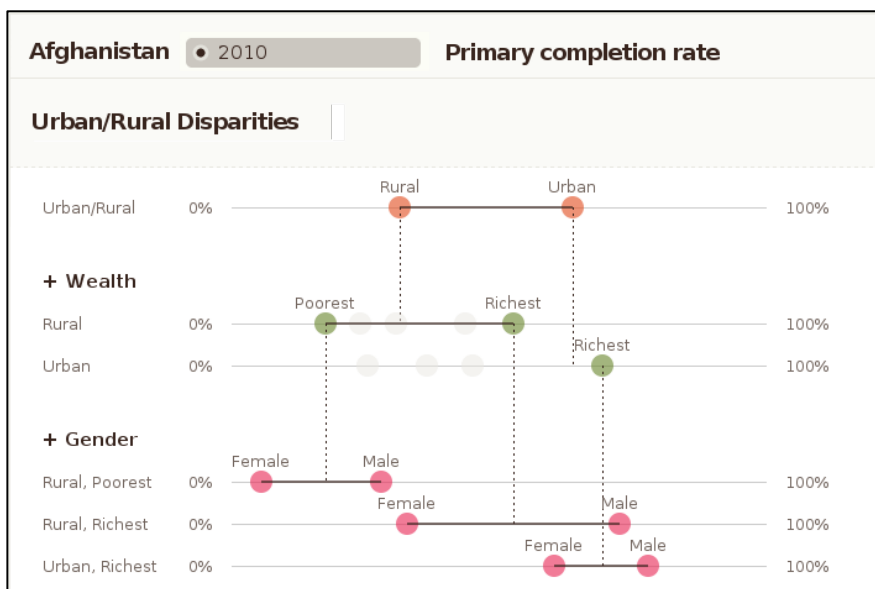


The World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) highlights the powerful influence of circumstances, such as wealth, gender, ethnicity and location, over which people have little control but which play an important role in shaping their opportunities for education. It draws attention to unacceptable levels of inequality in access and learning across countries and within countries, with the aim of helping to inform policy design and public debate. www.education-inequalities.org

In Afghanistan in 2010, less than half (23%) the number of girls were completing primary education than the number of boys (51%).



The interaction between geography, gender and poverty is a potent source of exclusion. While almost 80% of the richest boys in urban areas were completing primary school in 2011, the same was true for only 4% of the poorest girls living in rural areas.



A four-part strategy for providing the best teachers

1. Attract the best teachers

The quality of an education system is only as good as the quality of its teachers. It is not enough just to want to teach. People should enter the profession having received a good education themselves. They need to have completed at least secondary schooling of appropriate quality and relevance, so that they have a sound knowledge of the subjects they will be teaching and the ability to acquire the skills needed to teach.

Policy-makers need to focus their attention also on achieving the right mix of teachers, including recruiting teachers from under-represented groups. In Afghanistan, women teachers are urgently needed, but the lack of girls' education until recently has meant very few women qualified to become teachers. In 2008, less than 30% of those in initial teacher education were female, even though the numbers had been increasing thanks to programmes

enabling women to enter teaching with lower qualifications. In 2011, less than a third of teachers in primary education in the country were female.

Afghanistan aims to increase the number of female teachers by 50% by 2014 under an interim education plan that includes monetary and housing incentives for female teachers, and special teacher training programmes for women in remote areas and women who do not meet current qualification requirements.

Another response to the teacher deployment problem is to recruit teachers from within their own communities. In Afghanistan, female teachers are vital for girls to be able to enroll in school, but women face cultural barriers in seeking work in areas where they are not chaperoned by family members. As a result there are twice as many female teachers as male teachers in the capital, Kabul, while in Uruzgan province, most of which is remote and unsafe, there are no female teachers who have the minimum qualification. Local recruitment of female teachers is one solution to such extreme inequality. Local recruitment has its benefits, such as teachers' greater acceptance of a rural posting and reduced attrition, but some of the most disadvantaged communities lack competent applicants where access to primary schooling is low, as is the case in Afghanistan.

Working with secondary school girls to raise their interest in teaching and offering financial assistance is another strategy that can potentially increase the number of female teachers and has been seen to work in other contexts.

2. Improve teacher education so all children can learn

Initial teacher education should make up for weak subject knowledge. Prospective teachers should ideally enter teacher education programmes knowing enough about the subjects they are going to teach. In some income countries, however, teachers often enter the profession lacking core subject knowledge because their own education has been poor. In such circumstances, initial teacher education programmes need to ensure that all trainees acquire a good understanding of the subjects they will be teaching.

Teachers need to be trained to teach, particularly in early grades. Teacher education programmes need to support teachers in being able to teach early reading skills in more than one language and to use local language materials effectively.

Preparing teachers to support learners from diverse backgrounds is essential. As a result of inadequate training, many newly qualified teachers are not confident that they have the skills necessary to support children with more challenging learning needs.

Pre-service education is vital to provide teachers with the skills to teach multiple grades, ages and abilities in one classroom.

Initial teacher education needs to provide classroom experience. Teachers' skills need to be improved through ongoing education. Regular supervision and ongoing training have the potential to address knowledge gaps and upgrade and reinforce acquired skills.

Mentoring new teachers once they are in the classroom is vital, particularly in poorer countries where teachers have limited prior practical experience.

Trainers need training too. The key role that teacher educators play in shaping teachers' skills is often the most neglected aspect of teacher preparation systems. Curriculum reform requires teacher educators to be adequately prepared to orient teachers in curriculum changes.

Distance education can boost countries' capacity to train teachers. Distance teacher education programmes have the potential to reach more future teachers at lower cost than programmes in teacher education institutions. Costs

per student graduating from distance programmes have been estimated at between one-third and two-thirds of conventional programmes.

3. Get teachers where they are most needed

Inequality in deployment leads not only to fewer teachers in deprived areas but also to disadvantaged students being taught by teachers with weaker subject knowledge, exacerbating inequality in learning outcomes. Unequal distribution of teachers is one reason some children leave school before learning the basics. Financial incentives and good housing can promote deployment to remote or rural areas.

Local recruitment of teachers to serve in their own communities can also address teacher shortages in remote or disadvantaged areas and can result in lower teacher attrition. However, some of the most disadvantaged communities lack competent applicants where access to primary schooling is low. Women are also less likely than men to work in disadvantaged areas.

4. Provide incentives to retain the best teachers

Governments should ensure that teachers earn at least enough to lift their families above the poverty line and make their pay competitive with comparable professions.

Teachers' salaries – and the rates at which they increase – are conventionally determined by formal qualifications, the amount of training and years of experience. But pay structures based on these criteria do not necessarily lead to better learning outcomes. Using multiple evaluators is one way of producing fair and successful teacher appraisals, but requires considerable time and resources on the part of the evaluators and those being evaluated.

Low pay for contract teachers is not a long term solution to poor quality education. One reason why there is no clear difference at all in performance between contract teachers and regular teachers in some settings is that ultimately they face similar challenges.

Relating teachers' pay to the performance of their students is an alternative approach that has intuitive appeal. But it is difficult to find reliable ways to evaluate which teachers are the best and add the most value. Performance-related pay can also have unintended side effects on teaching and learning and may reward only those schools and teachers whose students are already performing well, rather than those that have helped children improve the most, to the detriment of disadvantaged learners.

However, a more appropriate way of motivating teachers to improve education quality is to offer an attractive career path, with promotion criteria that take into account initiatives by teachers in addressing diversity and supporting weak students. Many teachers have limited prospects of promotion, however. Those teaching in remote areas may be especially affected.

Strengthening teacher governance

If days are lost because teachers are absent or devote more attention to private tuition than classroom teaching, the learning of the poorest children can be harmed. Absenteeism can also reinforce gender disparities.

Understanding the reasons behind these problems is crucial for the design of effective strategies to solve them. Strong school leadership is required to ensure that teachers show up on time, work a full week and provide equal support to all. In some countries, high levels of absenteeism are due to many teachers missing more school days than can be explained by non-teaching duties or illness, rather than extreme absenteeism by a minority of teachers who might be easily identified.

Even though teacher absenteeism is widespread in some countries, it is not inevitable, which suggests it is a response to working conditions.

Combining monitoring with incentives could be more beneficial than penalties for tackling absenteeism. Other interventions aimed at enhancing teacher accountability are often expected to reduce teacher absenteeism, but do not necessarily do so.

Governments should work more closely with teacher unions and teachers to formulate policies and adopt codes of conduct to tackle unprofessional behaviour such as persistent absenteeism and gender-based violence. Codes of practice should be consistent with legal frameworks for child rights and protection and a range of penalties, such as suspension and interdiction, clearly stipulated.

Private schools that charge low fees are seen by some as one way of expanding access to better quality education for disadvantaged children in areas where government schools are failing. Such schools are also seen as a less expensive way of achieving quality, because they can recruit teachers at lower cost than government schools. Advocates of low fee private schools argue that students in these schools achieve better learning outcomes than students in government schools, but such differences arise partly because teachers in government schools often face more difficult conditions, teaching larger classes and children with a wider diversity of learning needs.

Gender-based violence in schools is a major barrier to quality and equality in education. Programmes and policies addressing gender discrimination and gender-based violence need to protect and empower girls, challenge entrenched practices, bring perpetrators to light and take action against them. Legal and policy frameworks that provide general protection for children need to be strengthened and publicized, and teachers need to be made aware of their own roles and responsibilities. Advocacy and lobbying constitute an important first step in seeing that policies tackling gender-based violence are in place and enforced.

Curriculum and assessment strategies that improve learning

Policy-makers should ensure the curriculum focuses on securing strong foundation skills for all, is delivered at an appropriate pace and in a language children understand.

Governments should ensure that adequate and relevant resources are in place to support learning from the earliest years and build a culture of reading. The quality of pre-school education makes a crucial difference to children's learning in early primary grades. Support outside school hours can help.

Curricula that do not acknowledge and address issues of inclusion can alienate disadvantaged groups within the classroom, and so limit their chances to learn effectively. In some countries, curricula reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. Where gender-responsive curricula have been developed, test scores measuring attitudes on several gender-related issues improved.

Getting out-of-school children back into school and learning is vital. Governments and donor agencies should support accelerated learning programmes to achieve this goal. Teachers are generally recruited from surrounding communities, ensuring a common cultural and linguistic background and enhancing accountability to community members.

Some countries have made great strides in using national assessments to identify children who need extra attention. Classroom-based learning assessments help teachers identify students who are struggling to learn, diagnose their learning difficulties and choose strategies to support them. Students can also make considerable gains if they are offered more opportunities to monitor their own learning.

Targeted additional support via trained teaching assistants or community volunteers is another key way of improving learning for students at risk of falling behind.