

# Foreword

This edition of the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010, Reaching the marginalized*, comes at a time of great uncertainty. We are still grappling with the far-reaching impact of the global financial and economic crisis not only on the world's banking systems, but on all areas of human development – including education. We are at a crossroads. Either we continue with business as usual and risk undoing the considerable progress made over the past decade, or we use this crisis as an opportunity to create sustainable systems which promote inclusion and put an end to all forms of marginalization.

The gains achieved since the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals were adopted in 2000 are undeniable: great strides have been made towards universal primary education, increased participation in secondary and tertiary education and, in many countries, gender equality. More widely, there have been improvements in overcoming hunger, poverty, and child and maternal mortality.

The global financial crisis could radically change all this. *Reaching the marginalized* demonstrates that declining government revenue and rising unemployment now pose a serious threat to progress in all areas of human development. Government budgets are under even greater pressure and funding for education is especially vulnerable. So are poor households. Rising poverty levels mean that the challenge of meeting basic human needs is a daily struggle. Lessons from the past teach us that children are often the first to suffer – as is their chance to go to school.

In response to this crisis, governments urgently need to create mechanisms to protect the poor and vulnerable. They must also seize the opportunity to build societies that combat inequality, so that all may benefit and prosper. Education is at the front line. Not only do schools teach literacy and lay the groundwork for productive lives, they also play a crucial role in promoting tolerance, peace and understanding between peoples, and in fighting discrimination of all kinds. Schools are the place where indigenous groups can learn to read and write in their mother tongue, where cultural diversity can thrive and where children can try to escape the hardships of conflict and displacement.

This year's *Global Monitoring Report* underscores that there is a long way to travel. There are still at least 72 million children who are missing out on their right to education because of the simple fact of where they are born or who their family is. Millions of youths leave school without the skills they need to succeed in the workforce and one in six adults is denied the right to literacy.

The 2010 Report is a call to action. We must reach the marginalized. Only inclusive education systems have the potential to harness the skills needed to build the knowledge societies of the twenty-first century. The international community has a determining role in supporting countries' efforts to protect and expand their education systems. We must not abandon them at this critical juncture. Promises to help poor countries out of the crisis must now translate into the financial resources that many governments so urgently need.

It is my intention that UNESCO should continue to vigorously advocate for increased investment in education. As the lead agency for Education for All, we have a special responsibility to encourage and support those most at risk from the present crisis. As we stand at the crossroads, with only five years left to meet our collective commitments, let us have the courage and determination to choose the path that lets all children, youths and adults fulfil their right to education.



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