



THE CENTRAL ROLE OF EDUCATION IN THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Save the Children

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OF EDUCATION
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I. INTRODUCTION

The set of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) formulated in 2000 with targets for 2015 crystallized the growing consensus which emerged during the 1990s, namely, that poverty reduction and the provision of basic social services need to be at the centre of development policy.

Of the eight MDGs, two are directly related to education systems:

- MDG 2 calls for the achievement of universal primary education by 2015 whereby every child will complete a full course of primary education.
- MDG 3 calls for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women with, specifically, the elimination of gender disparities at primary and secondary school levels by 2005 and across all education levels by 2015.

The remaining MDGs focus on other interrelated development areas that are greatly influenced by the progress made towards MDGs 2 and 3.

The UN Millennium Development Goals	
 Goal 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	 Goal 2 Achieve universal primary education
 Goal 3 Promote gender equality and empower women	 Goal 4 Reduce child mortality
 Goal 5 Improve maternal health	 Goal 6 Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases
 Goal 7 Ensure environmental sustainability	 Goal 8 Develop a global partnership for development

Ten years through the 15-year perspective set for the attainment of the MDGs and the Education for All (EFA) goals¹, there are two significant trends for education development:

- firstly, government resources have begun to shift away from primary education towards secondary and tertiary levels and,
- secondly, across the MDGs the relative importance given to education by donors has been declining.

Between 2000 and 2007, across sub-Saharan Africa, the share of total government education expenditure devoted to primary education fell from 49% to 44% (Rawle, 2009), and for the first time in the past decade, total aid disbursements for education declined while aid to basic education stagnated in 2008 compared to the previous year. The economic slowdown will have negative effects on education financing in the poorest countries and is jeopardizing the strong advances made over the past decade. It is estimated that the resources available for education in sub-Saharan Africa may have fallen by US\$4.6 billion a year on average in 2009 and 2010 (UNESCO, 2010).

In the current global context, it is crucial to revitalize the profile of basic education on political agendas, by emphasizing the strong linkages between primary education – and other components of basic education – and the other MDGs. The central messages are that:

- progress towards the MDGs will be slowed if the universalization of primary education, and the expansion of other areas of basic education, are not accelerated, and that
- a stronger focus on equity in education can generate a virtuous cycle to redress inequalities in other MDGs.



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1 In 2000, at the World Education Forum in Dakar, 164 country governments together with an array of international organizations, donor agencies and International NGOs adopted a set of six goals under the banner of Education for All (EFA). These covered the universalization of a good quality primary education, expansion and improvement of programmes of early childhood care and education (ECCE), rapid expansion of adult literacy and other life skills programmes, gender equality across all levels of education and a greater emphasis on quality at all levels. Together, the six goals were regarded as constituting an agenda for basic education. This definition of basic education is used in this paper.

II. EDUCATION GOALS: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

The fundamental argument for promoting the education agenda remains – a basic education of good quality is an essential human right and as such should be a priority for governments and donors. Basic education is essential for developing an understanding of the world and the possibilities this provides, and for being able to function effectively within it. Without the knowledge and various skills developed through schooling and other basic education programmes, the opportunities for individuals and the ability to act independently are greatly reduced. In addition, accelerating the movement towards the education MDGs will lead directly to an acceleration of many of the other MDGs, especially those focusing on poverty reduction and general improvements in health.



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MONITORING PROGRESS

The EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) for 2010 describes in detail the progress so far in achieving universal primary education and gender parity, and other basic education goals.

MDG 2. Universal primary education by 2015

- *Increased enrolment:* Global progress towards universal primary education has been encouraging and the number of children out of school in 2007 was 28% lower than in 2000. Some of the world's poorest countries have dramatically increased enrolments, narrowed the gender gap and extended opportunities for disadvantaged groups. Since 1999, enrolments in sub-Saharan Africa have been increasing five times as fast as during the 1990s and gender disparities have been narrowing. By 2007 the primary net enrolment ratio was 86% in South and West Asia and 73% in sub-Saharan Africa. For girls, the ratios were only a little lower at 84% and 71% respectively. Nevertheless progress has not been universal.
- *Declining rates of progress:* according to most recent UNESCO's estimates, there are still 69 million out-of-school children worldwide despite the acceleration in enrolments (UNESCO, September 2010). Current trends will still leave 56 million children out-

of-school in 2015 and the rate of progress may be slowing. Regional progress has been uneven. Out-of-school numbers have fallen more rapidly in South Asia, driven by advances in India, than in sub-Saharan Africa. While enrolment ratios 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, and 13% of children entering school in South and West Asia drop out in the first grade.

- *High-risk groups and locations:* Enrolments in countries affected by conflict and fragility are stagnating and these countries account for more than half of all children who are out-of-school, adding up to 39 million (Save the Children, 2010a). In addition, even in well-performing countries particular groups of children remain at risk including indigenous and minority ethnic/language populations, those living in slums and in very sparsely populated areas, migrants, nomadic populations, individuals with diverse learning needs, children with disabilities and the poor in general. Within each of these categories, girls' participation tends to be lower than that of boys.

MDG 3. Gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and at all levels by 2015

- *Increased parity in primary education:* the UNESCO Institute for Statistics data indicate that gender parity in access to primary education has been increasing. Across all developing countries, the gender parity index for the primary net enrolment ratio (comparing the female ratio to the male ratio) increased from 0.92 in 1999 to 0.97 in 2007. The South and West Asia region showed the greatest improvement (from 0.84 to 0.96) and the two regions currently furthest from the target are the Arab States (0.92) and sub-Saharan Africa (0.93). Not surprisingly there are variations within regions. In sub-Saharan Africa, gender parity has been reached, or almost reached, in 21 out of 34 countries with data. In South and West Asia gender parity has been achieved in five of the six countries with data.
- *Disparities are greater in secondary education:* while gender parity has been increasing in secondary education it is below that found in primary education. Across all developing countries, the gender parity index for the gross enrolment ratio in secondary education increased from 0.89 to 0.94. However, while the index has increased in South and West Asia it stood at 0.85 in 2007. In sub-Saharan Africa, disparities actually increased with the index falling from 0.82 to 0.79. Within this region only eight countries out of 35 with data had achieved or almost achieved gender parity by 2007 and female enrolments were less than 40% of the total in seven countries.
- *Disparities in tertiary education vary greatly by region:* gender disparities favour females across Latin America, the Caribbean and the Pacific, are very small in the Arab States and in East Asia, and substantially favour males in South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Overall the share of females in tertiary enrolments increased from 44% in 1999 to 48% in 2007.

Other basic education goals

Little attention is being given to the full EFA agenda, apart from primary schooling and gender parity, despite the interconnected nature of EFA goals and the MDGs.

- *Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes:* participation is uneven with coverage particularly low in South and West Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa. Children from the poorest households have the most to gain from these programmes but are least likely to access them - in Egypt, children from the wealthiest households are 28 times more likely to attend pre-school than children from the poorest households.



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- *Youth and adult learning:* coverage varies considerably across developing countries but generally these programmes receive low priority. In sub-Saharan Africa, vocational training programmes largely bypass the informal sector where most marginalized people work, while in India such programmes reach only around 3% of rural youth.
- *Adult illiteracy:* the latest estimates from UNESCO suggest 796 million adults are illiterate (UNESCO, September 2010). Apart from in China, progress towards the target of halving the level of illiteracy has been slow. On current trends, the world will be less than halfway towards this goal by 2015. The GMR 2010 cites Brazil, India and Burkina Faso as countries where there have been recent encouraging developments.
- *Quality of education:* there is little evidence that the quality of schooling has improved over the past decade and millions of children leave school each year without having acquired basic literacy and numeracy skills. Evidence from learning achievement tests suggest that the absolute levels of achievement are exceptionally low in many countries. In addition, there are disparities within countries. Teacher shortages are undermining the universalization of quality primary education – globally, an additional 10.3 million teachers are needed to meet universal primary education (UPE) by 2015. Several countries particularly in sub-Saharan Africa have pupil-trained teacher ratios of over 80:1 and regional inequalities tend to be very pronounced.

EQUITY IN EDUCATION

All countries, rich and poor, have marginalized groups in their populations who have significantly lower incomes, lower rates of life expectancy, a higher incidence of health problems, including high maternal mortality rates, and who are more poorly nourished than the rest of the population. These are precisely the groups of people who could gain most from efforts to improve their literacy and to gain other skills, and whose children could benefit most from being enrolled in schools. These population groups, however, are often the ones who lose out most in terms of accessing basic education programmes, even in countries where overall access has improved. Marginalized individuals and groups not only receive fewer years of education, they also tend to receive a lower quality learning experience through having less qualified or inexperienced teachers, and attending schools with inferior infrastructure and fewer learning materials.

The underlying causes of marginalization are diverse and interconnected. Household poverty is the strongest and most persistent factor and the direct effects of poverty tend to be reinforced by group-based identities such as gender, ethnicity, race, language and culture. For instance, schools and health clinics may be built but teachers and health staff may ignore particular children or potential patients; drinking water facilities may be located in areas of villages where certain groups are not allowed to walk; schools may be open but parts of the curricula may be offensive to certain population groups; services may be offered using languages which are not understood. People living in slums, remote rural areas or conflict-affected zones are also typically among the poorest and most vulnerable in any society, and are underserved in education. Disability remains one of the least visible but most potent factors in educational marginalization. Although these different groups often face unique challenges, they all share levels of discrimination and stigmatization that limit their education opportunities. These disadvantages rarely exist in isolation: “Poverty, gender, ethnicity and other characteristics interact to create overlapping and self-reinforcing layers of disadvantage that limit opportunity and hamper social mobility.” (UNESCO, 2010). The widely-held view that national progress in education automatically trickles down to the most disadvantaged has proved false. In many countries large sections of society are being left behind. Box 1 presents a selection of examples provided in the GMR 2010.

Box 1. Examples of Marginalization in Education

The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010, *Reaching the Marginalized*, focuses attention on marginalization and discrimination in education. Many examples are provided, mainly for the age group 17 to 21, including:

- In India, the richest 20% average eleven years of schooling compared to three years for the poorest 20% of rural females.
- In Egypt, the richest boys and girls average ten years of schooling compared to four years for poor rural females in Upper Egypt.
- In Uganda, 85% of young pastoralists have an average of two years of schooling compared to a national average of six years.
- In Guatemala, average years in school range from 6.7 for Spanish speakers to 1.8 for Q'eqchi' speakers. Girls of Indian ethnicity from poor households have primary net attendance rates of 60% compared to the national average of 82%.
- In Nicaragua, the share of the population with fewer than four years of schooling ranges from 7% in Managua to almost 60% in Jinotega.
- In Cambodia, being a rural girl in a hill province increases the risk of not being in school by a factor of five. Three-quarters have less than two years of school compared to a national average of 12%.
- In Mexico, average years of schooling range from 5.7 for females in the poor Chiapas region to over 10 in the federal district.
- In Peru, on average an indigenous person has two years less education than the national average while poor indigenous girls have four years less.

Source. UNESCO, 2010

The expansion of basic education leads to improvements in the other MDGs across the population in general. This is even more the case for socially and economically marginalized groups who have the most to gain from basic education.

III. THE CENTRALITY OF EDUCATION TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE MDGS

Because it provides knowledge and skills, encourages new behaviour and increases individual and collective empowerment, education is at the centre of social and economic development. The connections between education levels and attributes such as income, health status, and longevity are well documented across both developing and developed countries. More recently, interest has grown in the crucial role of education in combating other constraints on societies' and individuals' efforts to raise living standards and improve the quality of life. The ways in which education underpins the set of MDGs is essential for considering the powerful add-on effects of education on human development.

MDG 1: ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER

Education is a powerful driver for poverty reduction and sustainable economic development. It empowers people with the knowledge and skills they need to increase production and income, to create and take advantage of employment opportunities and to reduce hunger and malnutrition. Social change and long-term prospects for economic growth rely considerably on the expansion of quality learning opportunities for all. Greater equity in both education enrolments and school quality across all population groups will result in a more equal income distribution and reduce socioeconomic inequalities in general (UNESCO, 2010).

A considerable amount of evidence on the positive economic effects of a completed primary education, especially for those working in agriculture, has been generated over the past 40 years. An exercise modeling the impact of attainment in fifty countries between 1960 and 2000 found that an additional year of schooling can increase a person's earnings by 10% and average annual gross domestic product (GDP) by 0.37% (Hanushek et al., 2008). Another cross-country study suggests that each additional year of education increases income by 10% (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2004). In general, economic rates of return to individuals' and societies' investment in primary education have been reported to be higher in low income countries than in high income countries and to be higher for primary education than for secondary or tertiary education. Furthermore, the recent Commission on Growth and



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Development (2008) concluded that social returns probably exceed private returns through the broader contribution to society of educated individuals.

A particularly influential early study which analyzed the effects of primary education on agricultural production in 13 countries found that the average annual gain in production associated with four years of schooling was 8.7% (Lockheed, Jamison and Lau, 1980). More recently de Muro and Burchi (2007) examined the relationship between primary education and food insecurity across 48 countries. The results indicate that doubling the attendance rates in primary education for rural populations would reduce levels of food insecurity by between 20% and 24%. Recent efforts to measure the effect on income of the quality of education suggest that these are higher than previously understood (Hanushek and Wossman, 2007).

The incidence of poverty across households is closely linked to educational attainment. For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reports that in Papua New Guinea, people living in households headed by a person with no formal education constitute more than 50% of the poor while in the Republic of Serbia, the poverty level of households where the head has no schooling is three times higher than the national average (UNDP, 2010a).

Other components of basic education also impact on poverty reduction and hunger. The feeding and body weight monitoring provided in many early childhood programmes can directly alleviate malnutrition while research based on the International Adult Literacy Survey has shown that adult literacy programmes can raise earning potential at a similar rate as additional years of schooling. As China has shown during the past two decades, combating illiteracy aggressively is possible and can provide governments with the incentive for moving their citizens towards economic sectors with higher productivity.

MDG 4: REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY

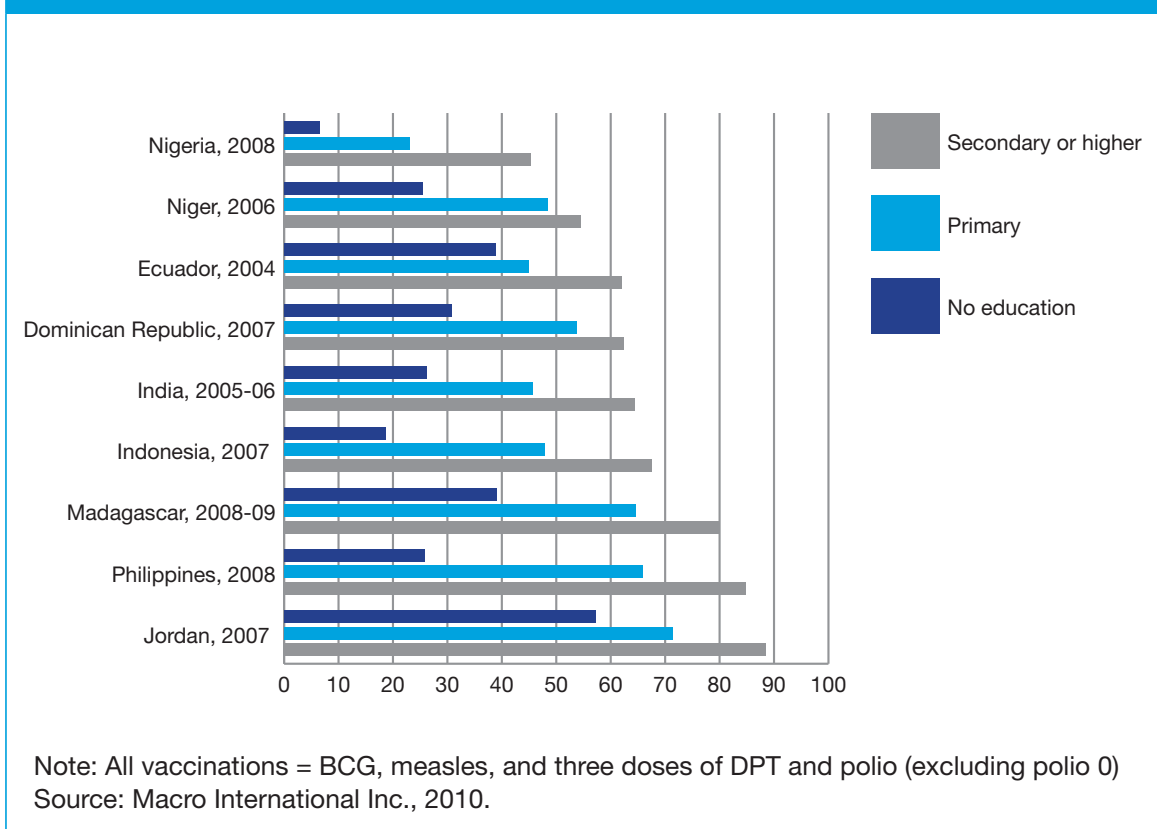
The education of today's children and young people can ultimately determine the behaviour and habits of tomorrow's parents. Children of parents with at least a basic education are more likely to survive after the age of five. This is because educated parents, particularly mothers, have been shown to make better use of available health services and provide greater quality care to their children (Save the Children, 2010b). While the effects of mothers' education on child health vary across countries, on average, each additional year of a mother's schooling reduces the probability of the infant mortality rate by 5% to 10% (Schultz 1993). Having a mother with a primary education reduced child death rates by almost half in the Philippines and by around one third in Bolivia (UNESCO, 2009). In Syria in 2008, 77% of mothers whose child died before the age of 5 had not completed a primary education (UNDP, 2010a). The most effective maternal education on child health includes breastfeeding and nutrition, birth spacing and the use of preventive health interventions (Malhotra and Schuler, 2005). The mothers' education level is closely associated with the immunization and nutritional status of children under age five (UNDP, 2010a). Figure 1 describes the relationship between mothers' education and vaccination rates for the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, India, Indonesia,

Jordan, Madagascar, Niger and Nigeria. The risk of stunting in Bangladesh is reduced by 22% for a child whose mother has completed a primary education (UNESCO, 2009).

While a mother's primary education has a positive effect on child survival, in most countries the effects are much stronger at the secondary school level (UNESCO, 2009). In Ethiopia, child survival rates are more than twice as high for mothers with a secondary education than for those with only a primary education – a reduction from 111.1 to 54.3 child deaths per 1,000 live births. Demographic and health surveys suggest that in Indonesia, child vaccination rates are 18.7% for children whose mothers have no education, and are 67.6% for children whose mothers have completed at least a secondary education. In Mozambique in 2003, child vaccination rates were almost universal (97.7%) for mothers with secondary education and higher – more than double that of mothers with no education (48.6%). In sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that approximately 1.8 million children's lives could have been saved in 2008 if all mothers had at least secondary education (Watkins, 2010).

Effective school health programmes which integrate health, nutrition and sanitation education and services into schools have been proven to improve health. Examples of these programmes are the provision of malaria treatments, de-worming, school-feeding programmes and clean water. These can directly impact the health and survival of children. ECCE programmes which include comprehensive measures for supporting families through maternal and child health, micronutrient supplementation, initiatives to support household food security, parental leave and childcare allowance can also have positive effects on the development and well-being of young children. (UNESCO, 2010).

Figure 1: Child vaccination and mother's level of education, selected countries, most recent year (% of children 12-23 months who had received specific vaccines by the time of the survey)



MDG 5: IMPROVE MATERNAL HEALTH

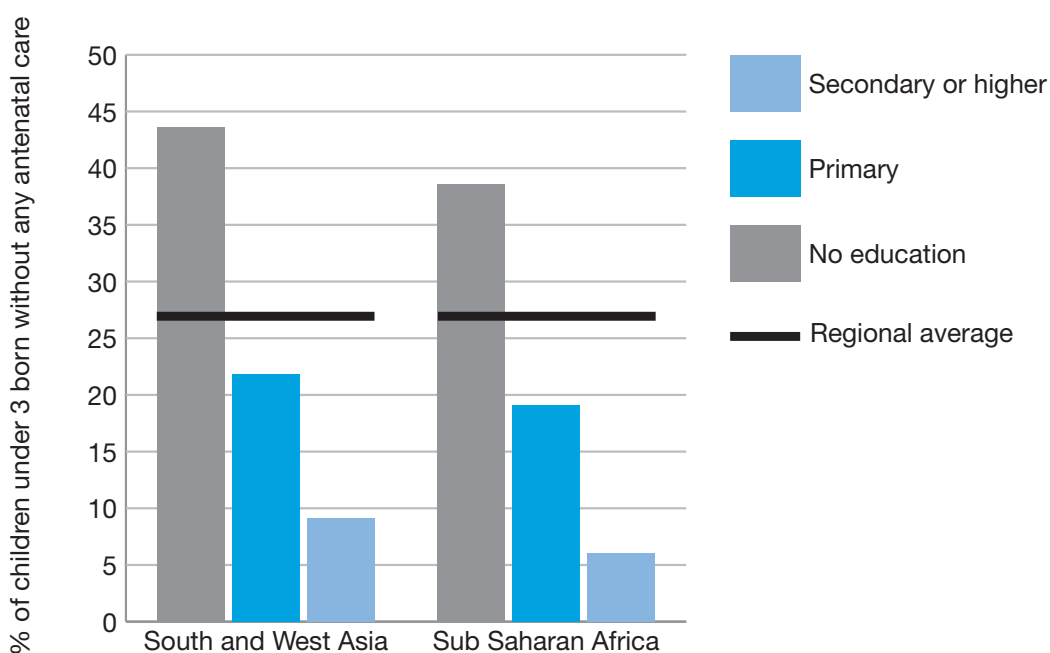
An estimated half a million women lose their lives each year from pregnancy and birth-related causes – and for every death another thirty women suffer severe long-term injuries (UNESCO, 2010). Progress towards the target of reducing the maternal mortality rate by two-thirds has been minimal. Most of the deaths and injuries are linked to a lack of antenatal care during pregnancy while women who are malnourished and suffer from micronutrient deficiency face particularly higher risk.

Links between maternal health and education are strong. Education delays the age at which young women give birth, particularly for younger women who are susceptible to problems in pregnancy. Adolescent girls are up to five times more likely to die from complications in pregnancy than women in their 20s, and their babies are also at higher risk of dying (United Nations, 2001)

Poorer and less educated women, especially those living in rural areas, are far less likely to give birth in the presence of a skilled health worker than better educated women who live in wealthier households (Save the Children, 2010b). Across South and West Asia, 44% of women with no education give birth without receiving antenatal care compared to 22% of women

with a primary schooling and 9% of women with at least a secondary education (UNESCO, 2010). The percentages are similar across sub-Saharan Africa. (See figure 2). A woman with a primary schooling in Burkina Faso is twice as likely to have a skilled birth attendant present during delivery as one with no schooling. To the extent that education conveys reproductive health messages in general and empowers women to seek and demand health services, the world will move closer towards improvements in maternal health.

Figure 2: Children under 3 born without antenatal care by mothers' level of education, South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, circa 2005



Note: figures presented are population weighted averages. The sample of countries used to estimate the sub-Saharan Africa average represents more than 80% of the total population of the region and the sample used to estimate the South and West Asia average more than 90%.

Source: Macro International Inc. (2009)

MDG 6. COMBAT HIV AND AIDS, MALARIA AND OTHER DISEASES

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) remains the world's leading infectious killer (UNESCO, 2010). Globally, in 2008, 33.4 million people were living with HIV, two-thirds of whom were women, and two million died from Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Despite massive reductions in infection rates, an estimated 2.7 million people are newly infected every year. Education can directly prevent new HIV infections through providing information about the causes, and indirectly through contributing to overcoming the socioeconomic barriers that



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foster its spread, for example, poverty, ill health and gender abuse and violence. In addition it can encourage access to effective treatment and help to combat stigma and discrimination against infected and affected people.

Health education promotes a better understanding of HIV and other major diseases, through providing knowledge of infection pathways, prevention methods, and safer sexual relations. While 40% of all new infections occurred between the ages of 15-24 in 2008, the 2010 UNDP MDG Report indicates that knowledge of HIV among young people is still very low in many countries. Surveys across several African countries indicate that only one third of young males and less than one-fifth of young females were reported to have comprehensive and correct knowledge of HIV (UNDP, 2010b). Educated people are much more informed about HIV and AIDS. A study covering 32 countries showed that women with post-primary education were five times more likely than illiterate women to know about HIV and AIDS (Vandermootte and Delmonica 2000).

Educational inequalities often combine with other forms of disadvantage to aggravate the prevalence of HIV amongst vulnerable groups. For example, knowledge of HIV and related practices, such as condom use, vary dramatically according to gender, household income and place of residence (UNDP, 2010b). Through involvement with communities and parents, educational institutions can reach vulnerable and at-risk groups, and provide them with enabling and protective learning environments. (Joint UN Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS), Inter-Agency Task Team (IATT) on Education, 2009).

Ignorance, stigma and discrimination prevent people from being tested for HIV and accessing proper treatment. While preventative measures can intercept HIV infection, education can inform infected groups of the different therapy options. People suffering from the disease need to understand their HIV status, the benefits and side effects of treatments and how to gain affordable access to quality care (UNAIDS IATT 2006). Students in schools which have

discussed the nature of HIV and AIDS are systematically more accepting of people living with the disease (UNAIDS IATT 2009).

MDG 7: ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Education can equip people with the knowledge, skills, values and behaviour needed for environmental sustainability. Programmes can promote a better understanding of local environments, change consumption and production patterns, and help anticipate future ecological threats. Climate change is leading to increasingly severe and unpredictable natural disasters. According to the International Disaster Database, the number of natural disasters is now more than four times higher than in the 1970s. The threat of natural disasters due to climate change has increased the vulnerability of poor households and children. The stakes are particularly high in low-income countries (Save the Children 2008), which are generally less prepared for extreme weather conditions, more susceptible to the ill-effects of environmental hazards and more reliant on biodiversity. Education can foster the individual change of attitudes and values and the social transformation patterns required to address these issues.

Recognizing the linkages between education and environmental sustainability, some governments have integrated climate change modules into their compulsory education programmes and many school-based projects and activities have been designed and implemented with the participation of pupils, teachers and others, such as recycling water and energy and the monitoring of beaches (UNESCO ASPnet, 2009). Similarly, schools have introduced Disaster Risk Reduction strategies into the curriculum and children have been involved in developing preparedness and evacuation plans. Showing children the basic required steps in case of particular environmental disasters results in communities being better able to respond when they strike. Several governments are also attempting to use adult literacy programmes and other non-formal learning activities within their plans for adapting to the implications of climate change. For instance, a review by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) of the climate change adaptation policies of ten African countries indicates the role of education in the promotion of drought-tolerant and early-maturing tree crop species and the exploitation of new and renewable energy sources (IFPRI, 2010).

IV. SCALING UP THE ACHIEVEMENT OF MDGs THROUGH EXPANDING EDUCATION

Two strategies are necessary for accelerating the movement towards the other MDGs through the further development of the education system.

1. Firstly, access to quality education needs to increase: more children need to be enrolled in school and more adults enrolled in formal or non-formal programmes, and the quality of education needs to improve. This requires increased and better utilized domestic and external education expenditure, more and better trained teachers, more and better quality teaching materials, greater accountability and transparency in the delivery of education services, widespread institution-building and, overall, greater political will translated into more attention given to supporting the education sector at the highest decision-making levels.
2. Secondly, within this overall expansion, governments need to implement initiatives which (a) ensure that currently underserved groups are specifically catered for and (b) increase the positive impact of education on the other MDGs.

Recommendations

1. ***Basic services – including primary and other components of basic education – need to be provided within a focused, coherent and comprehensive inter-sectoral national framework.***

The benefits of education can be maximized through the integration of basic social services provision – such as education, health and nutrition – and other poverty reduction measures. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and related programmes which were initiated across many sub-Saharan African countries in the late 1990s and exist today in over 60 poor countries across most regions are evidence of this. In these programmes, to varying degrees, basic services have been ring-fenced and given priority in budget allocations.



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2. ***A focus on equity needs to be at the centre of strategies to meet all MDGs. Planning for the provision of basic services such as primary education needs to focus more forcefully than in the past on those specific characteristics of***

particularly marginalized groups, which make provision more difficult and limit the ability of the groups to take advantage of what is available.

Providing services for the poor and marginalized is often only one part of the problem. The other is to reduce the factors which may result in these population groups not making use of the services provided. The interconnectedness of the MDGs requires a greater focus on the characteristics of population groups inadequately covered by government services and the nature of the constraints in providing services for all.

Inequities in the provision of one basic service result in inequities in others – and this is particularly the case for basic education. All anti-poverty programmes need to be more sharply focused and disaggregated. As countries move closer towards the MDGs, it becomes increasingly clear that those individuals not covered do not have a random set of characteristics but belong to specific population groups. Initiatives need to be specifically tailored to each group and take into account the reasons for its marginalization.

- 3. As part of a pro-equity approach, it may be necessary to go beyond the provision of free primary education and expand the coverage of social protection measures and cash transfers which use school enrolment and attendance as the conditions for cash payments to households.***

Conditional cash transfers have been used extensively and effectively in Latin America with the joint objective of providing cash incomes for the poorest populations and at the same time encouraging households to enroll and retain their children in primary school. These initiatives have proved popular and effective (UNDP, 2010a). Primary school enrolment has been chosen as the requirement for the cash payments precisely because it is seen as the most effective initiative for affecting behaviour and providing knowledge in ways which will have a multiple positive impact on the community. Similar schemes were introduced in several other countries, including Indonesia after the economic crisis in the early 1990s and in Bangladesh aimed at girls and secondary schooling. So far there has been some reluctance across sub-Saharan Africa (apart from Malawi) to introduce these schemes partly because the poor are a larger proportion of the total population than in other regions of the world, and therefore the scheme would be expensive, and partly due to concerns about financial transparency and accountability. However, the high level of effectiveness of the schemes suggests that they need to be increasingly considered.

- 4. Teaching and learning in primary schools should enhance MDG-related skills, knowledge and behaviour.***

There are many ways in which primary schools could be organized so that they increase the impact that schooling has on the MDGs, particularly in the areas of public health and environmental sustainability. Fighting child mortality and improving girls' empowerment may be assisted by curricula on cleanliness, basic sanitation, and measures to minimize contagious diseases. Positive behaviours can be learned and reinforced in school.

The same is true for environmental sustainability - school programmes can be used, for instance, to stress the need to conserve and not waste water and trees. School feeding programmes, such as those introduced in many countries, can directly improve nutritional status. Schools can provide the space for promoting gender equality and empowerment broadly across society. This can be done both through subject teaching and the design of gender-sensitive learning materials and through behaviour which is encouraged during lesson-time and outside of it. Increasing the number of female head-teachers will provide important role models.

5. Aspects of the EFA agenda in addition to primary schooling have a positive impact on the MDGs.

Most studies of the beneficial impact of basic education on issues related to the other MDGs focus on primary schooling. However, the other components of basic education, described through the EFA goals, can contribute to the achievement of the MDGs. ECCE programmes are known to have a positive impact on school attendance and learning achievements at least in the early years of primary school, while nutrition and body weight monitoring, vaccination programmes and other interventions also have notable impacts on child health. Adult literacy programmes for both women and men can provide opportunities for improving labour productivity and introducing water and sanitation programmes, and the impact on women's behaviour results in lower child mortality rates and higher levels of maternal health. Equally, various types of occupational and life skills programmes aimed at young people and adults can help in increasing incomes, reducing poverty and moving towards MDG 1.

6. While primary and other components of basic education remain a priority, the direct contribution of secondary education (particularly for young women) to the achievement of the other MDGs needs to be recognized and planned for.

While completion of a basic education is associated with higher quality health indicators, progress on the other MDGs are influenced even more by the completion of a secondary education, and especially by women. MDG 3 calls for gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005. Women with a secondary education seek out



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antenatal care and better medical treatment in general, take more measures to improve their children's health, delay marriage and have fewer children (thus reducing the chances of maternal mortality), are more likely to send their children to school, and have greater economic opportunities that will alleviate poverty and hunger.

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The set of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) formulated in 2000 with targets for 2015 crystallized the growing consensus which emerged during the 1990s, namely, that poverty reduction and the provision of basic social services need to be at the centre of development policy.

The connections between education levels and attributes such as income, health status, and longevity are well documented across both developing and developed countries. More recently, interest has grown in the crucial role of education in combating other constraints on societies' and individuals' efforts to raise living standards and improve the quality of life.

This publication outlines the ways in which education underpins the set of MDGs and highlights the powerful add-on effects of education on human development.

“From better health to increased wealth, education is the catalyst of a better future for millions of children, youth and adults. No country has ever climbed the socioeconomic development ladder without steady investments in education.”

Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO

“Ending the cycle of poverty for children, their families and their communities – begins with education.”

Anthony Lake,
Executive Director of UNICEF

“Education plays a central role in the achievement of all MDGs and needs to be given top priority across all regions, including those affected by natural disasters and conflicts. There can be no peace and prosperity without education.”

Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned,
Chairperson of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development

“Overall, progress has been made in achieving universal primary education. However, donors and States must now focus on the education of children living in conflict-affected and fragile states. This is a huge proportion of the 69 million out-of-school children and it's not improving.”

Jasmine Whitbread,
Chief Executive Officer of Save the Children