

The Report at a glance

→ Progress towards Education for All

Steady progress has been made since 1998, especially towards universal primary education (UPE) and gender parity among the poorest countries, but the pace is insufficient for the goals to be met in the remaining ten years to 2015.

Encouraging trends represent considerable achievements in many low-income countries:

- Primary-school enrolments are up sharply in both sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, with nearly 20 million new students in each region.

- Globally, 47 countries have achieved UPE (out of 163 with data available).

- Projections show that 20 additional countries (out of 90 with the relevant data) are on track to achieve UPE by 2015; 44 countries are making good progress but are unlikely to achieve the goal by 2015.

- Girls' primary enrolments have also risen rapidly, especially in some of the lowest-income countries of sub-Saharan Africa, and South and West Asia.

- Gender and educational quality measures are increasingly visible in national education plans.

- Public spending on education has increased as a share of national income in about 70 countries (out of 110 with data).

- Aid for basic education more than doubled between 1999 and 2003 and, following the G8 summit, could rise to US\$3.3 billion per year by 2010.

- The Fast Track Initiative has emerged as a key coordinating mechanism for aid agencies.

Major Education for All challenges remain:

■ UPE is not assured:

- About 100 million children are still not enrolled in primary school, 55% of them girls.

- 23 countries are at risk of not achieving UPE by 2015, as their net enrolment ratios are declining.

- Primary-school fees, a major barrier to access, are still collected in 89 countries (out of 103 surveyed).

- High fertility rates, HIV/AIDS and armed conflict continue to exert pressure on education systems in the regions with the greatest EFA challenges.

■ The 2005 gender parity target has been missed by 94 countries out of 149 with data:

- 86 countries are at risk of not achieving gender parity even by 2015.

- 76 out of 180 countries have not reached gender parity at primary level, and the disparities are nearly always at the expense of girls.

- 115 countries (out of 172 with data) still have disparities at secondary level, with boys being under-represented in nearly half, in marked contrast to the primary level.

■ Quality is too low:

- Enrolments in early childhood care and education programmes have remained static.

- Fewer than two-thirds of primary-school pupils reach the last grade in 41 countries (out of 133 with data).

- In many countries, primary teacher numbers would have to increase by 20% a year to reduce pupil/teacher ratios to 40:1 and to achieve UPE by 2015.

- Many primary-school teachers lack adequate qualifications.

■ Literacy gets short shrift:

- 771 million people aged 15 and above live without basic literacy skills.

- Governments and aid agencies give insufficient priority and finance to youth and adult literacy programmes.

■ Aid for basic education is still inadequate:

- At US\$4.7 billion in 2003, bilateral aid to education – 60% of which still goes to post-secondary education – has increased since 1998 but remains well below the 1990 high of US\$5.7 billion.

- Total aid to basic education accounts for only 2.6% of Official Development Assistance; within this category, adult literacy's share is minuscule.

- While aid to basic education will likely increase in line with overall aid, its share would have to double to reach the estimated US\$7 billion a year necessary just to achieve UPE and gender parity.

- Disproportionate volumes of bilateral aid go to middle-income countries with relatively high primary enrolments.

- By mid-2005, the Fast Track Initiative had resulted in pledges of only US\$298 million.

→ Literacy

Literacy is:

- A right still denied to nearly a fifth of the world's adult population.
- Essential to achieving each of the EFA goals.
- A societal and an individual phenomenon, with attention needed to both dimensions.
- Crucial for economic, social and political participation and development, especially in today's knowledge societies.
- Key to enhancing human capabilities, with wide-ranging benefits including critical thinking, improved health and family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention, children's education, poverty reduction and active citizenship.

The literacy challenge has absolute and relative dimensions, particularly affects the poor, women and marginalized groups, and is much greater than conventional measures indicate:

- In absolute numbers, those without literacy skills are mainly in sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, and East Asia and the Pacific. Prospects for meeting the 2015 goal hinge largely on progress in the 12 countries where 75% of those without literacy skills live.
- In relative terms, the regions with the lowest literacy rates are sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, and the Arab States, all with literacy rates around only 60%, despite increases of more than 10 percentage points since 1990.
- Illiteracy is associated to a significant extent with extreme poverty.
- Women are less literate than men: worldwide, only 88 adult women are considered literate for every 100 adult men, with much lower numbers in low-income countries such as Bangladesh (62 per 100 men) and Pakistan (57 per 100 men).
- 132 of the 771 million people without literacy skills are aged 15 to 24, despite an increase in this group's literacy rate to 85%, from 75% in 1970.
- Direct testing of literacy suggests that the global challenge is much greater than the conventional numbers, based on indirect assessments, would indicate, and that it affects both developed and developing countries.

The literacy challenge can be met only if:

- Political leaders at the highest level commit themselves to action.
- Countries adopt explicit literacy policies to:
 - Expand quality primary and lower-secondary education;
 - Scale up youth and adult literacy programmes;
 - Develop rich literate environments.

Scaling up literacy programmes for youth and adults requires:

- Active government responsibility for adult literacy policy and financing as part of education sector planning.
- Clear frameworks to coordinate public, private and civil society provision of literacy programmes.
- Increased budgetary and aid allocations. Literacy programmes receive a mere 1% of the education budget in many countries. An additional US\$2.5 billion a year to 2015 will likely be needed to make significant progress towards the Dakar literacy goal.
- Basing programmes on an understanding of learners' demands, especially their language preferences and their motivations for attending class, in consultation with local communities.
- Curricula that build on these demands, with clearly stated learning objectives and the provision of adequate learning materials.
- Adequate pay, professional status and training opportunities for literacy educators.
- Appropriate language policies, as most countries facing stark literacy challenges are linguistically diverse. The use of mother tongues is pedagogically sound but must offer a smooth transition to learning opportunities in regional and official languages.

Developing literate environments and literate societies requires sustained attention to:

- Language policies.
- Book publishing policies.
- Media policies.
- Access to information.
- Policies to get books and reading materials into schools and homes.

Acquiring, improving and using literacy skills happens at all levels of education, and in multiple formal and non-formal contexts. Achieving each of the EFA goals depends strongly on policies that foster literate societies and set high standards for literacy, the foundation for further learning.