

# Education: 2015 and beyond

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## 2000–2015: A two-track process

As 2015 approaches, judgements are beginning to be made as to the success or otherwise of the international commitments made in 2000 to meet ambitious basic education goals and targets within 15 years. At the same time, research, consultation and debate is under way to determine what should come next, beyond 2015. It is a time for both reflection and reappraisal.

International commitments to education have been running on two tracks: sometimes converging, sometimes diverging. At best, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) agenda have been complementary; at worst, they have resulted in a duplication of effort and a source of conceptual and programming tension in both international and national arenas. While the MDG goals for education stand on the broad platform of eight goals designed to contribute to poverty reduction, the six EFA goals are specific to education. EFA is grounded in an enabling, human rights approach to learning opportunities. Globally, the MDGs have received much more attention than EFA, especially in bilateral agencies and in the World Bank.

The Millennium Summit held in New York in 2000 established eight development goals. Goal 2 focuses on Universal Primary Education (UPE): 'Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. One of the targets of Goal 3 (Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women) is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education, no later than 2015.' This is a purely formal schooling agenda. Both goals were conceived as important contributors to poverty reduction.

The EFA movement (if such it is) gained impetus in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 at the World Conference on Education for All. Basic education was defined as learning opportunities for all, from early childhood through to, and including, adulthood. Ten years later, in Dakar, Senegal, the World Education Forum committed itself to the Dakar Framework for Action. This includes six goals:

**Goal 1** – Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

**Goal 2** – 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.

**Goal 3** – Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

**Goal 4** – Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

**Goal 5** – Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education 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.

**Goal 6** – Improving all aspects of the quality of education, and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

The equitable achievement of UPE lies at the heart of the MDGs. And this objective has also been the primary driver of EFA activity internationally, despite its good intentions in highlighting the relatively neglected areas of literacy, skills and early childhood education and care (ECE). The wording of the EFA goals is a good deal more convoluted than the MDGs, representing, in part, the different international processes that drafted and agreed the goals. EFA goals 3 and 4 have been particularly difficult to interpret, but the quality of learning receives important emphasis that is absent from the MDGs. Three of the EFA goals (on quality, skills and ECE) are qualitative, with no milestones or benchmarks.

While complementary in their broad intentions, the two 'movements' have created their own co-ordinating and reporting machinery internationally and sometimes within individual countries; this despite both having their origins in the United Nations (UN). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the primary co-ordinator for the MDGs in the UN system, while the annual Millennium Development Goals Report is produced by the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). The World Bank also reports on the MDGs. UNESCO and its Institute for Statistics and the editorially independent EFA Global Monitoring Report oversee global reporting on the EFA goals.

## Progress and missed opportunities

There has been progress. Sixty developing countries have achieved or are on track to achieve UPE according to the World Bank's Global Monitoring Report 2012. Between 1999 and 2008, an additional 52 million children were enrolled in primary school. Sixty-

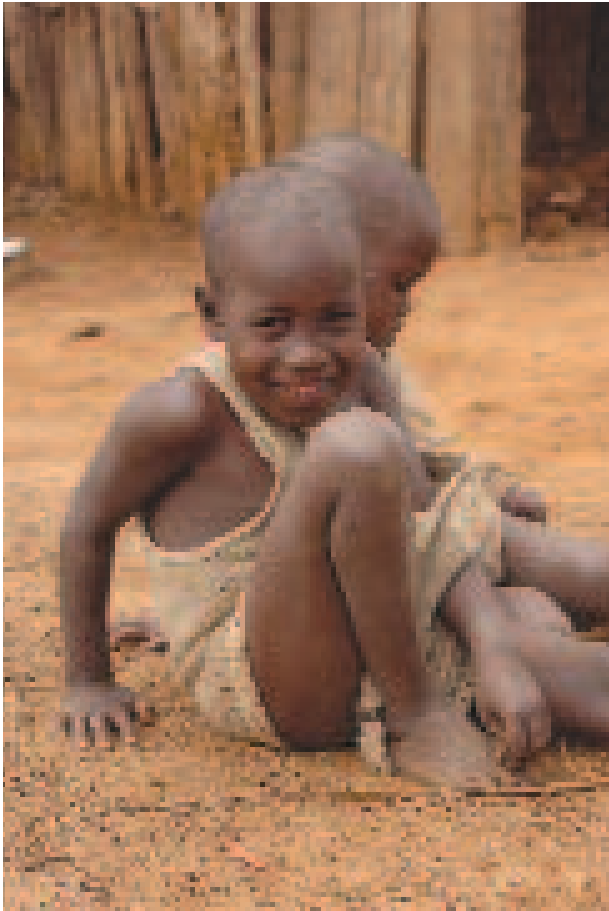


Photo: Commonwealth Secretariat

### *Where will they be in 2020?*

one million children were out of school in 2010 compared with 105 million in 2000 (EFA Global Monitoring Report). In developing countries as a group, 96 girls were enrolled in primary and secondary school for every 100 boys in 2009, compared with ratios of 91 and 88 respectively at the beginning of the decade.

However, on the broader EFA agenda, there has been very limited progress. Approximately 800 million young people and adults lack basic literacy skills – nearly two-thirds of them women. This represents 17 per cent of the world's population. Hunger among under-fives constrains early childhood educational opportunities. The quality of education is very low in many developing countries, and millions of children leave school with very limited reading, writing and numeracy skills – 'too many children are learning far too little' (EFA Global Monitoring Report). For many commentators, this is the major failing of the last decade.

Different reports draw some rather different conclusions about what will be achieved by 2015. The World Bank's 2012 Global Monitoring Report concludes that 'developing countries are within 10 percentage points of the on-track trajectory, meaning that on current trends, these two development goals (MDG2a and MDG3a) will likely be reached by 2015'. The 2011 EFA Global Monitoring Report, on the other hand, concludes that 'prospects for achieving universal primary education by 2015 are deteriorating'. It suggests that if recent trends continue, there could be more children out of school in 2015 than in 2010.

Since Dakar and New York, getting the international community to work together in a co-ordinated way to support the realisation of the MDG and EFA goals has been problematic. The recently relaunched Global Partnership for Education (previously the Fast Track Initiative) is the most visible sign of efforts to improve co-ordination (especially across agencies) and to facilitate additional funding to resource-constrained countries. It is, however, a relatively poor relation to comparable efforts in the health sector.

At one stage, in the early years of the last decade, the G8 group of countries appeared to get behind basic education with a series of aid effectiveness and funding commitments. But these have fallen away since the middle of the decade. It is true that aid to education has gone up from US\$6.8 billion in 2002 to \$13.4 billion in 2009, but education's share of overall aid has remained static. Aid to basic education increased from \$2.7 billion to \$5.6 billion over the same period, but only \$3.4 billion of the \$5.6 billion went to the poorest countries. These figures, according to the EFA Global Monitoring Report, are 'vastly insufficient to fill the \$16 billion financing gap'. And the prospects for further commitments are relatively bleak given the financial crisis in OECD countries.

Ideally, UNESCO would have played a leading technical and political campaigning role in advancing EFA. In practice, it has found this difficult. In individual countries and in some UNESCO regions, it has been proactive and can point to worthwhile support. Internationally, however, it has proved largely ineffective; its co-ordination mechanisms such as the EFA High Level Group being symbolic rather than influential. The World Bank has been more proactive, often playing the lead role in MDG and EFA-related research backed up by the financial clout to orchestrate and influence strategy and programming.

## 2015 and beyond

Thinking about 2015 and beyond is under way in many quarters: in international organisations, international NGOs, aid agencies, research institutes and think tanks. In the context of a possible second generation of MDGs, the importance and priority that may or may not be accorded to education is uncertain. For the EFA 'movement', the question may be couched rather differently; can interest in, and support for, basic and lifelong education be sustained as a major international commitment, or is a broader sector platform required?

In the UN system, a Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda is at work and a High-Level Panel on the post-Millennium Development Goals has been established; both are charged with leading a process of identifying a new international framework for development. Examples of the UN's work to date include a report from its High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability, which argues for global sustainable goals.

DESA's Committee for Development Policy has concluded that the development model underlying the MDGs has not worked as intended, having oversimplified the policy agenda. The MDGs have been 'lost in translation'. It states that 'progress on poverty eradication has been slow and uneven. Multiple and intertwined crises have emerged with financial, energy and food security crises coexisting against the background of an unsustainable depletion of the world's natural resource base.' It proposes – very broadly – a

post-2015 development framework that incorporates the core principles articulated in the Millennium Declaration, built around the central objective of expanding people's freedoms in a sustainable and equitable way with security from adverse shocks.

Comparable thinking around EFA appears to be less well advanced. UNESCO is convening a five-agency Task Force on EFA post 2015, but there is no obvious product from this group as yet. The EFA Global Monitoring Report will focus on 2015 and beyond in its 2013 report. A recent regional UNESCO meeting in Bangkok concluded that EFA is of continuing relevance, 'yet there is need to go beyond current EFA goals. Learning, equity and quality of education, including a focus on teachers and skills development must feature prominently in any future education development agenda. Furthermore, there must be both an education-specific development agenda beyond 2015 and explicit reference to education in all global agendas, given the fundamental role of education in advancing human development.'

Away from these and other official initiatives, a recent paper from the Center for Global Development in the USA has offered a wide-ranging critique of the current MDGs and, in the case of education, suggested secondary school completion rates as one new 2030 target. The Brookings Institute has issued its Global Compact on Learning, arguing that it is time for 'an expanded education agenda that centers on the goal of learning for all as the new minimum threshold to which the education community must aspire'. A recent consultation on education by the UNDP Network for Policy Research, Review and Advice on Education and Training (NORRAG) noted that the position of education in the post-2015 agenda is not a priority topic for some international organisations. It suggested that a possible shift towards a focus on skills, growth and employment 'represents a risk for the traditional sectoral vision of education, but can also be the last opportunity to revisit the visions and fundamentals of the international education and training policies'.

An international civil society campaign, Beyond 2015, is also pushing for a strong and legitimate successor framework to the MDGs. This is uniting 300 organisations worldwide from North and South.

In this welter of consultative activity, a strong campaigning voice for education in high-level international forums is yet to surface. There is insufficient evaluation of the experience and the worth of goals and targets for education since 2000, especially in the poorest countries, and a far from unified stance on how to advance the case of education beyond 2015. Compared with the political dynamic prior to 2000, there is no obvious influential champion to both make and test the case. Too little is yet being done to suggest that the 'lost in translation' critique will be heeded in the next round of international targetry for education.

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