

Education MDGs in Mozambique

Stepping stones towards a sustainable and balanced education system in support of national development and growth

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Introduction

In 2000, during the 55th session of the UN General Assembly, 191 Heads of State and Heads of Government adopted the Millennium Development Declaration that later gave way to defining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a 'roadmap' towards poverty reduction.

The MDG agenda demonstrates a global commitment to improving access and quality of basic services as key to eliminating poverty and stimulating overall development. The eight MDGs work together towards a common goal, providing a guide to prioritising actions and promoting efficiency and effectiveness in terms of resource allocation and progress monitoring.

Mozambique adhered to this international agenda, making the MDGs central to the government's five-year National Development Plan. Progress has been made, but much remains to be done. This short paper focuses on MDGs 2 and 3 up to and beyond 2015.

Education MDGs: progress and challenges

At the time of independence in 1975, Mozambique had the world's highest illiteracy rate – around 93 per cent. Since then, the government has prioritised the provision of primary education for all as a basic human right and a fundamental condition for

development and economic growth. It also sees education as a means of cultivating peace through providing citizens, especially children and youth, with practical and theoretical instruments and values of self-respect, respect for others and respect for society, which are crucial to individual success and for contributing towards building a strong and flourishing nation.

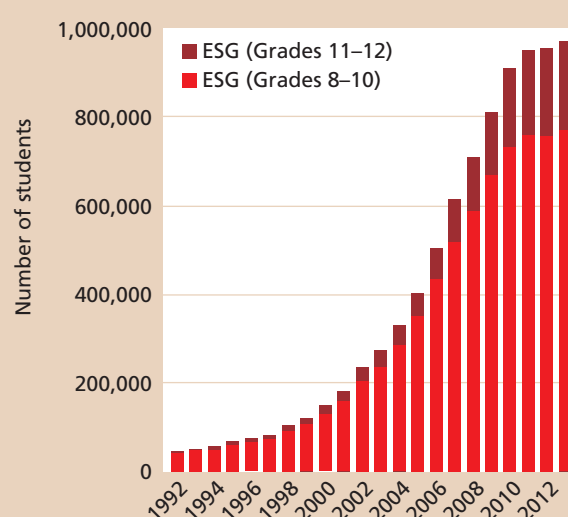
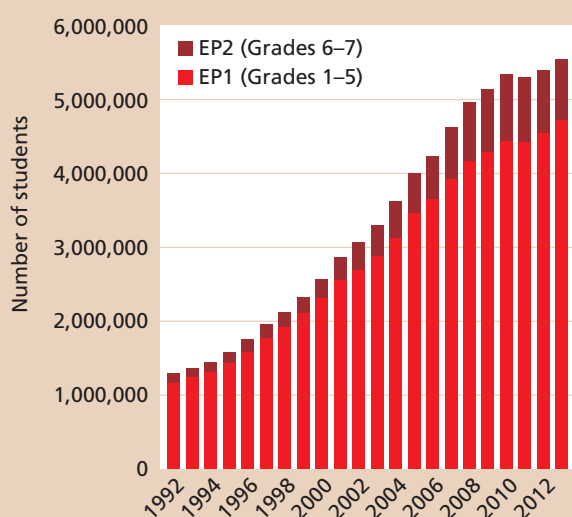
Although the civil war of 1977–92, which resulted in the destruction of much of the country's education infrastructure, was an enormous setback for the country's development, great progress has been made since the signing of the Peace Accord in 1992. Since then, the education system at all levels has expanded beyond expectations, as demonstrated in Figure 1.¹

In 2013, it is estimated that 95 per cent of six to 12-year-olds are in primary school (in 1997, this was only 40 per cent²). In secondary education, student participation has grown even more exponentially: gross enrolment in lower secondary education has increased from seven per cent in 1997 to 44 per cent in 2013, and in upper secondary from one to 19 per cent. Secondary schools can now be found in all districts of the country, which has helped to halve the adult illiteracy rate (48 per cent, 2008³).

In general, girls have benefited most from the expanded system. Their participation is getting close to parity, both at the primary and secondary levels, with the most significant progress being in the upper level of secondary education. Currently, around 48 per cent

Figure 1

Student participation in primary and secondary education, 1992–2012



of students in primary and secondary schools are girls. However, there is still a lot to be done.

There are big regional differences across Mozambique. Whereas primary education in the south is stabilising in terms of increasingly catering for children in the appropriate age group, in the north and centre of the country many children enter school late (at the age of eight or nine), thereby reducing their chances of remaining in the system to Grade 7 and progressing to the next level.

Although the absolute number of graduates has increased considerably since 1997, the primary completion rate is still below 50 per cent and has been stagnating since 2009 (Figure 3). This is primarily the result of low levels of retention throughout the system, caused by consistently high and rising drop-out rates over the years. As a result, since 2010, the number of children that

reach Grade 7 is falling (Figure 4). Consequently, it is expected that the primary completion rate will only start improving from 2015/2016 onwards.

In addition, the children that do go to school and manage to reach Grade 7 do not always acquire the relevant competencies needed for further learning or for their effective contribution to the development of the country. In short, Mozambique's education system has managed to expand and reach out to almost all corners of the country, but there are still great concerns about its efficiency and effectiveness.

There are several factors that contribute to the low efficiency and effectiveness of the education system. Recent studies⁶ suggest that poverty⁶ is the principal reason for students entering education late or dropping out early. Although primary education is free, direct

Figure 2

Girls' participation in primary and secondary education, 1992–2013

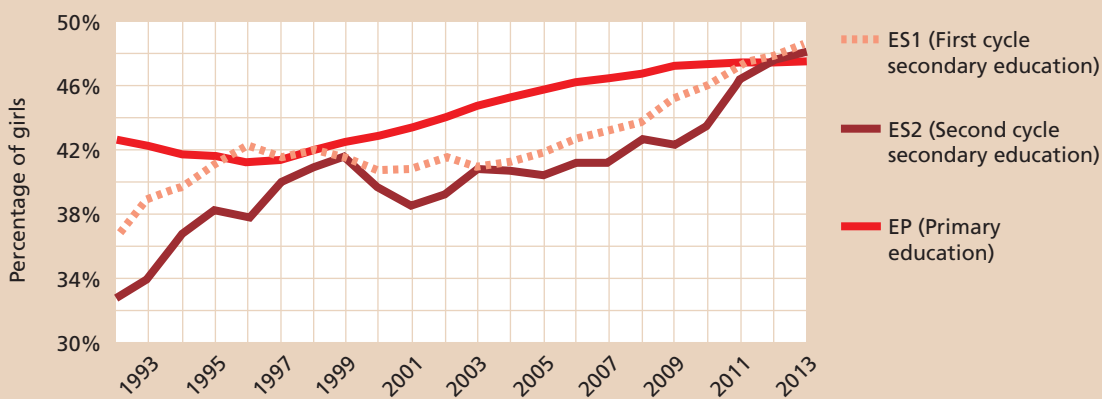


Figure 3

Primary completion rate (PCR), 1997–2012 (calculated over the number of graduates of Grade 7 and the total population of 12-year-olds)

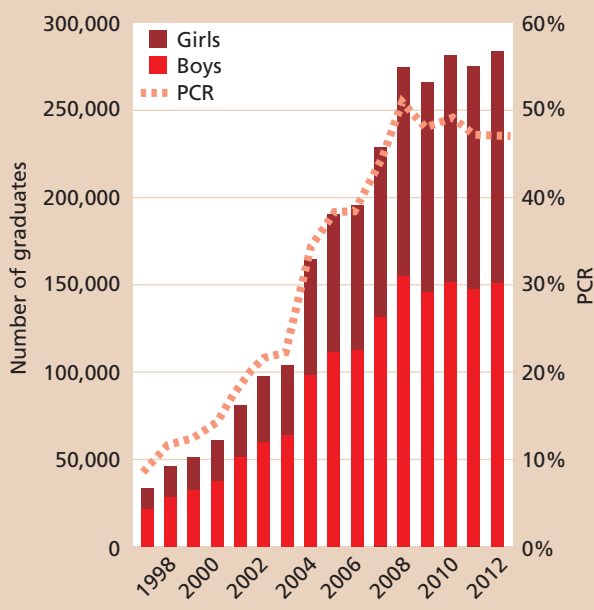
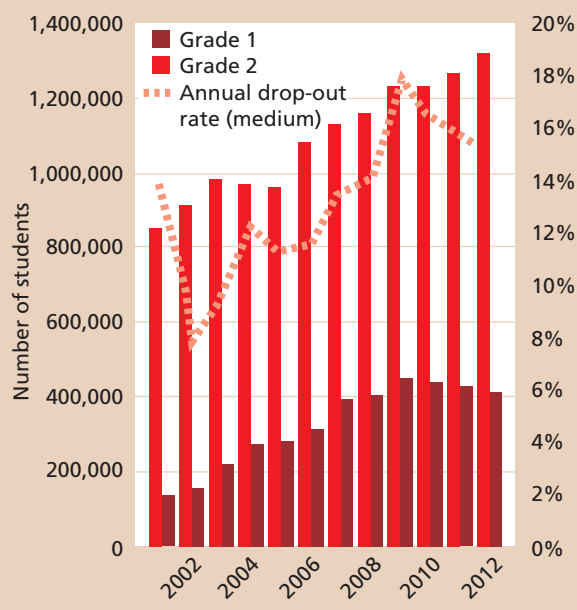


Figure 4

Number of students in Grades 1 and 7 per year, 2002–12 and average annual drop-out rate for primary education (Grades 1 to 7)



and indirect costs for the families (expenses related to the purchase of notebooks, pencils, clothing, etc., versus opportunity costs) are still relatively high. At the same time, the conditions under which most of our schools operate is not very conducive to learning:

- Around half of the classrooms are made of precarious materials and are without desks and chairs
- Thirteen per cent of students receive instruction under a tree
- The average pupil-teacher ratio is 1:63
- The level of absenteeism among teachers is high
- The annual non-salary expenditure in primary education is estimated at just US\$8 per child

Improving the quality of education requires a continued increase in funding. Currently, the government invests around six per cent of GDP in education, of which around 72 per cent is spent on salaries. Despite a steady annual economic growth of seven to eight per cent that ensures for a substantial yearly increase in domestic funding of education (between 2012 and 2013, this increase was 24 per cent), this is not sufficient to maintain an education system still in expansion. Furthermore, it will not lead to the quality of education necessary to produce the desired learning outcomes that are required to sustain and accelerate individual and societal development and growth.

Priorities up to and beyond 2015

Facing a dilemma of increasing educational needs and requirements, within a context of restrained human and financial resources, setting priorities becomes crucial. In the coming years, the provision of primary education for all remains our primary concern. As can be concluded from where we are now, there is still a long way to go before we can meet the current MDG target.

The Strategic Plan for Education 2012–16 defines our focus for the next few years and ensures that all children currently entering primary education will leave Grade 7 with basic learning competencies in the areas of reading, writing, calculus and general life skills, in order to advance in life and to contribute to the further development of the country.

For this to be realised, first and foremost there must be sufficient numbers and quality of classrooms, teachers and books. At the same time, to overcome the main barriers the system is currently facing, it will be necessary to:

- Introduce social support measures to ensure the retention of the most vulnerable children (the provision of school meals, financial support to orphans, etc.)
- Scale up (community-based) preschool interventions to better prepare children for learning

- Expand bilingual education
- Monitor learning outcomes at classroom level
- Enhance the management of our schools to ensure a more efficient and effective use of available resources

However, it is clear that investing in primary education cannot be at the total expense of developing an overall balanced education system. The results of the past in terms of increased numbers of primary school graduates have put great social pressure on expanding other levels of education. At the same time, the economic opportunities that are emerging will only benefit the development of the country if steered by an increased human capacity base capable of exploring and maximising its potential. There is a need to increase the overall levels of education among the population (basic education for all beyond the seven years of primary education), and to expand quality technical and higher education in order to create competencies in support of stimulating and innovating the social, political and economic climate on which the country's development hangs.

To conclude: we are faced with many challenges. We are committed to do better and to do more. However, we cannot do it alone. Global commitment to a common agenda in support of national development will remain as crucial as it was before.

Endnotes

- 1 All education statistical data presented in this paper originates from the EMIS of the Ministry of Education, 2013.
- 2 In 1997, the first postwar population survey took place, which provides the basis for calculating coverage indicators.
- 3 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, INE/UNICEF, 2008.
- 4 Studies from UNICEF; WB; Aga Khan.
- 5 It is estimated that more than half (54.7 per cent) of the population lives under the poverty line (National MDG progress report, 2010).

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