

# TAKE ACTION – January 2008

## Dear Gordon – a personal plea to the PM

**ACTION:** This month we will write to the Prime Minister to remind him of his promises on Education for All.

1. Write a personal letter to Gordon Brown (*Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP, 10 Downing Street, London SW1A 2AA*).
2. Pick out one or two issues from this action sheet. Ask what he plans to do about them.
3. Ask him to guarantee that the money he has pledged will be targeted effectively and the outcomes monitored.
4. Request that your letter and his response be forwarded to Douglas Alexander, Secretary of State for International Development.
5. Send a copy to your MP and ask him or her to also raise the issue with the Prime Minister.
5. Team up with someone in your group to make sure that your letter gets sent.

A year ago Gordon Brown asked us “*to become campaigners, calling on every government to give every child access to schooling*”. We’re taking him at his word – and now we want him to deliver on his promises.

Gordon Brown declared his personal support for the movement to achieve Education for All when in April 2006 he announced an additional investment of £8.5 billion over the next 10 years to work towards Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2 to “*ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling*”.

But since then there has been very little information forthcoming about exactly how that money is being allocated. And of course other priorities have arrived on his agenda.

### THE FUNDING

*“We cannot allow our promises that became pledges to descend into just aspirations, and then wishful thinking, and then only words that symbolise broken promises.” (Gordon Brown July 2007)*

It is estimated that rich nations need to invest **\$11 billion per year** in basic education to achieve MDG 2. Curiously, although total aid to basic education rose rapidly from \$2.7 billion in 2000 to \$5.1 billion in 2004, it fell back to \$3.7 billion in 2005. This is at odds with the promises made by world leaders and shows that we must be on our toes to monitor the situation.

The funding given to basic education is not only insufficient in itself, it is also often poorly

targeted, neglecting countries in sub-Saharan Africa and regions facing conflict for example. In 2004, three-quarters of the UK’s aid to basic education went to Bangladesh and India alone.

Although the UK can be congratulated on its overall pledge to Education for All, the Prime Minister should use his considerable influence to encourage other donor countries, especially his G8 colleagues, to give their fair share. Some of the richest countries in the world are not even giving a quarter of what they should relative to their national wealth.

### MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL 2

*“Unless we act [MDG 2] will not be met by 2015, not even by 2050 but at best by 2100.” (Gordon Brown July 2007)*

According to the latest figures from UNESCO, the prospect of meeting MDG 2 remains distant. Of 129 countries being monitored, 25 are far from achieving Education for All, about two-thirds of them in sub-Saharan Africa.

Meanwhile the goal of eliminating gender disparity by 2015 at both primary and secondary level will be missed in over 90 countries.

### NEGLECTED AREAS – CONFLICT

*“And it is because we are committed to the rights of every child that we will do for education what the Red Cross and Medecins Sans Frontieres do for health and seek to provide education not just in places of comfort and peace but everywhere.” (Gordon Brown July 2007)*

Over half the world's out-of-school population – **39 million children** – live in countries affected by conflict, but these countries receive less than a fifth of total education aid. Almost all are low income with fractured national institutions. One of the major factors is that these countries are chronically underfunded by donors.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo over 5 million primary school children are out of school; in Nigeria 8 million; in Sudan 2.4 million.

Children in areas of conflict face many day-to-day dangers, and schools are vital in providing protection, giving children stability, security and opportunity to develop. If out of school they are vulnerable to forced recruitment and exploitation.

Education can also teach key life skills, such as landmine awareness, how to protect against HIV/AIDS and other diseases. In the long term, the benefits can be passed on to future generations, contributing to economic growth, peace and stability, helping citizens to hold local and national systems to account, paving the way to good governance.

Of course donors are worried about the misuse of funds or the manipulation of education where governance is poor. Partnership with governments, NGOs and UN agencies can be used along with careful assessments, planning and monitoring to make sure that funds are used appropriately.

#### **ANOTHER NEGLECTED AREA – LITERACY**

*“Let me set out what I believe our partnership for 2015 can achieve for our first goal - to end illiteracy by ensuring schooling for all.” (Gordon Brown July 2007)*

Although the focus on primary education needs to be maintained as the principal route to Education for All, we should not forget those who have either not attended school or who have done so without becoming literate.

The term “basic education” covers three levels: (1) Early childhood education, (2) Primary education and (3) Basic life skills for youths and adults, including literacy. Of these, adult literacy has been sadly neglected by bilateral and multilateral donors.

It is shocking to learn that a fifth of the world's population, **774 million adults** lack basic literacy skills, some **64% of them are women**, and this share has remained virtually **unchanged** since the early 1990s. Women's literacy in particular has a strong influence on a child's education and health. On current trends, 72 countries will not succeed in halving adult illiteracy rates by 2015.

#### **QUALITY**

*“The US and G8 have pledged to help fill the immediate funding gaps in the Fast Track Initiative. And to set a ten year goal the UK has pledged \$15 billion - locking in the long-term financial commitment that is vital to delivering high quality education for all.” (Gordon Brown July 2007)*

Where schooling is on offer, too often it is of shockingly poor quality, and this inevitably results in low completion rates due to drop-out and poor learning outcomes. Poor teaching affects girls and women disproportionately and results in low adult literacy rates. Drop-out is of particular concern. Less than 63% of pupils reach the last grade of primary school in 17 sub-Saharan African countries, and in several African countries fewer than half the pupils who start primary school reach the last grade.

If **attendance** rates are measured rather than just **enrolment**, then the number of primary children out of school worldwide jumps from 72 million to 93 million.

To cope with increased enrolment, more properly trained teachers are needed if classroom sizes are to be kept down. **The world will need more than 18 million new primary school teachers by 2015.**

#### **USER FEES**

*“The injustices people inflict on one another are not god-given but man-made and we have it in our power to become the first generation in history to deliver to every child the long overdue basic right to education.” (Gordon Brown July 2007)*

According to the published data, tuition fees were formally abolished in 14 countries between 2000 and 2006. Nevertheless most children in public primary schools still face some type of charge, sometimes representing up to one-third of household income. Charges can include exam fees, “voluntary” payments for tuition, and transport or uniform costs.

In some countries governments have initiated successful cash-transfer schemes, whereby poor households receive cash payments if children enrol and attend school. Such schemes can increase participation in primary school, improve attendance and reduce grade failure.

In conclusion, we give Gordon Brown top marks for his rhetoric but implore him to follow-up with solid action urgently.

This sheet uses information from the *2008 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report* ([www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)), Save the Children Fund ([www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk)) and Global Campaign for Education ([www.campaignforeducation.org](http://www.campaignforeducation.org)).

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