

TAKE ACTION – October 2007

Education for All by 2015 – A dream within reach?

ACTION: This month we will write letters to local, regional and national newspapers to draw attention to the progress being made towards universal primary education and the barriers to Education for All.

Concentrate on just **one or two major points**. For example:

1. The great progress towards Education for All made since 2000 – 37 million more children in school – but much more needs to be done to meet Millennium Development Goal 2.
2. The importance of educating girls – impacts on health and child mortality.
3. User fees - the fact that in many poor countries families still have to pay school fees, taking up to a quarter of household income.
4. The importance of funding for the Fast Track Initiative.

“I want every parent, student and school in Britain and the developed world to become campaigners, calling on every government to give every child access to schooling.”

Gordon Brown, January 2007

Gordon Brown clearly thinks universal access to education is important. Most people would agree. Basic education – especially for girls – is simply one of the best development investments that can be made. It plays a pivotal role in the fight against poverty, and leads to significant improvements in health.

Education benefits not just children, but families, communities, and whole countries. It improves job chances and prosperity, promotes health, and strengthens community cohesion and stability.

- Just one additional year of schooling for girls reduces the under-5 mortality rate by 8%.
- Educated mothers are 50% more likely to have their children immunized.
- Each year of education a girl receives boosts her eventual wages by 10–20%.
- In Africa, Asia and Latin America, women with 7 or more years of schooling had between 2 and 3 fewer children than women with under 3 years of education.

Despite a string of international commitments throughout the 1990s, too many children still lack access to a basic education. Today in 2007:

- Over **77 million** school-age children are out of school
- **Two-thirds** of them are girls
- **781 million** adults worldwide can't read or write. That's a fifth of the world's population.

Education For All

In a spirit of optimism at the turn of the millennium, leaders of rich and poor countries committed to one of the most exciting pledges the international community has ever made: **Education for All** promised to provide free and compulsory primary education for every child in the world.

Central to this commitment were six goals agreed to by over 180 countries at the **World Education Forum** in Dakar, Senegal in 2000. Two were incorporated into **Millennium Development Goals** later that year.

Goal no. 2: Ensure that by 2015 all boys and girls are able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Goal no. 3: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.

Progress since then

Since 2000 the world has begun to see serious progress towards these goals. The numbers of children enrolling in school has risen at an unprecedented rate and the gender gap is slowly closing.

According to UNESCO:

- 47 out of 163 low-income countries have achieved **universal primary education** since

1998 and 20 more are on track to achieve it by 2015.

- **Primary school enrolment** grew by 27% in sub-Saharan Africa between 1999 and 2004.
- **Gender parity** in primary education has been achieved by two-thirds of the 181 countries for which data are available.

What are the barriers?

One of the key barriers to universal primary education is the existence of **school fees**.

An estimated 77 out of 94 poor countries, mostly in Africa, still charge some type of fee for basic education. These can consume up to a quarter of a poor household's income and are in addition to other costs such as uniforms, textbooks and loss of income.

Girls are particularly affected when families don't have enough money to send all of their children to school. Families often choose to educate their sons.

The elimination of school fees has important side-effects. It frees up money that can then be used to purchase other goods and services, thus stimulating local economies.

The Commission for Africa report in March 2005 recommended that "*African governments should undertake to remove school fees for basic education, and donors should fund this until countries can afford these costs themselves.*" As prime movers in setting up the Commission, the British government must take responsibility for seeing that this happens.

Some success stories

The abolition of school fees can have a dramatic effect. For example, when **Kenya** eliminated school fees in 2003, over a million children came into school and gender disparities in primary school all but disappeared.

In 2001, when **Tanzania** abolished school fees, enrolments increased by 50%. Tanzania is now on track to get every child into primary school in 2006 – nine years ahead of the EFA target.

Rwanda's education system was devastated by the genocide in 1994. But with the help of donors it is now on track to achieve Education for All by 2015.

Sustained funding

It is essential that countries wanting to follow these examples can get reliable, long-term support from the international community. When school fees are eliminated increased demand for school places mean more teachers and classrooms are needed. Secure funds must be available if the quality of education is to be maintained.

Such guaranteed support is provided by the **Fast Track Initiative (FTI)**, an important multi-donor mechanism that funds countries with strong national education plans to get all children in school (see Background).

The FTI has been hailed as one of the few working systems that enable donors to coordinate their aid, making it more efficient and effective on the ground, particularly in countries that traditionally receive little attention from donors.

What is the UK's role?

In April 2006, the UK government made a significant increased commitment to education and plans to spend £8.5 billion on education projects over the 10-year period from 2006 to 2016. This is an important demonstration of the UK government's international leadership on this issue.

But although the UK has scaled up its contributions to the FTI, spending £152 million over the 2004–2009 period, this still only represents about 10–15% of its overall spending on education.

The clock is ticking: Education for All will not be achieved by 2015 without a massive increase in aid from all donors. It is estimated that at least US\$10 billion a year are needed. This will require a tripling of total aid to basic education, at least 60% of which should be in the form of advance commitments through the Fast Track Initiative.

The UK government can be congratulated on its promises so far but it must follow these up with delivery of funds.

This sheet uses information from the 2007 *UNESCO Global Monitoring Report* (www.unesco.org), DfID (www.dfid.gov.uk), and the Global Campaign for Education (www.campaignforeducation.org).