

The Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007

The Education for All Global Monitoring Reports assess the progress achieved by countries in realising their commitments to provide education to children, youth and adults. Developed by an independent team and published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the reports identify needed policy reforms and best practice in key areas relating to education, draw attention to emerging challenges in education and seek to promote international cooperation in favour of education. They contain abundant country-specific data to illustrate their analyses.

The Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007, “Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education”, the fifth report in the annual series, focuses on encouraging countries and the international community to enhance early childhood care and education, giving special attention to equity and inclusion.

Because it adopts a comprehensive approach and insists that learning begins before a child walks through the classroom door, the new report naturally addresses in a substantive way the transition of young children from their early childhood experiences and home environments to primary schooling, the theme of this issue of Early Childhood Matters.¹ The following is a summary of the contents of the report, which was launched on 26 October 2006.

Learning begins at birth

Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007 examines the progress towards the achievement of the six Education for All (EFA) goals (see the box). The goals focus on the need to provide learning opportunities from infancy to adulthood and reflect a comprehensive perspective on education.

The *Global Monitoring Report 2007* focuses on the first of the six EFA goals, which calls upon countries to expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education (ECCE).

The report relies on a holistic definition of ECCE: ECCE supports children’s survival, growth, learning and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development from birth to entry into primary school. ECCE is a right recognised in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is also an instrument for guaranteeing other rights of children.

Early childhood programmes are crucial to ensuring children’s proper development, and they are vital in the establishment of routes out of social and economic disadvantage. They can improve the well-

being of young children in the developing world, where a child has a four in ten chance of living in extreme poverty, and 10.5 million children die each year before age 5 because of preventable diseases. The programmes can thereby promote reductions in extreme poverty and hunger, the overarching objective of the Millennium Development Goals.

Progress towards the six EFA goals

With a 2015 horizon for achieving the EFA goals, urgent and comprehensive action is needed, particularly in identifying and enrolling hard-to-reach children and making a dent in the literacy challenge.

Pre-primary education is being implemented only slowly

In 2004, almost 124 million children worldwide were enrolled in programmes that, in addition to providing care, offered structured learning activities in formal or non-formal settings. This represented a rise of 10.7 percent over the figure in 1999. Increases were especially pronounced (a little over 40 percent) in sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and South and West Asia. In most other regions, the climb was

modest, and, in East Asia, enrolments declined by almost 10 percent, mainly due to trends in China. Around 48 percent of the world's pre-primary entrants were girls, a proportion unchanged since 1999.

The global pre-primary gross enrolment ratio rose from 33 to 37 percent. There were substantial increases in the Pacific and the Caribbean and much smaller increases elsewhere. The gross enrolment ratio for East Asia was stable. A large enrolment

increase in sub-Saharan Africa was not matched by a similar rise in the gross enrolment ratio because of high population growth.

Primary education continues to expand

The world net enrolment ratio stands at 86 percent. Primary school enrolments grew the most between 1999 and 2004 in two of the three regions with the lowest level of attainment in universal primary education: by 27 percent in sub-Saharan Africa and

Education for All, the Dakar Framework and the Millennium Development Goals

Building on two United Nations instruments, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the international community adopted the World Declaration on Education for All, at Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. At the heart of the declaration, which was agreed to by delegates from 155 countries, is the recognition that universal education is the key to sustainable development and social justice.

The 2000 Dakar Framework for Action, approved by over 160 countries meeting at the World Education Forum, in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000, expresses the international community's commitment to a broad-based strategy for ensuring that the basic learning needs of every child, youth and adult are met within a generation and sustained thereafter. It sets the six EFA goals, as follows:

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
2. Ensuring that, by 2015, all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and ethnic-minority children, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

4. Achieving a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially among women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring the full and equal access of girls to and achievement in basic education of good quality.
6. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

The Millennium Development Goals, which were approved by world leaders at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, form an agenda for reducing poverty and improving lives. For each goal, one or more targets has been set, most for 2015. The first goal cannot be achieved without education, and two other goals make explicit reference to education, as follows:

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education. (Target: ensure that, by 2015, boys and girls everywhere will be able to complete a full course of good-quality primary schooling.)
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women. (Target: eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and at all levels of education by 2015.)

by 19 percent in South and West Asia, but only by 6 percent in the Arab States.

While grade 1 enrolments rose sharply, major challenges remain. Too many children who start school do not reach the last primary grade: fewer than 83 percent of children reach the last grade in half the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean for which data are available, while fewer than two thirds do so in half the countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

Out-of-school children

Progress is being made in reducing the number of primary-school-age children who are not enrolled in school. Between 1999 and 2004, the number fell by around 21 million, to 77 million. This is still unacceptably high, however. Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia are home to more than three quarters of these children, although the number in South and West Asia was halved between 1999 and 2004, mainly due to reductions in India. The global estimate, though high, understates the problem: household survey data show that many children enrolled in school do not attend regularly.

The children most likely to be out of school and to drop out live in rural areas and come from the poorest households. Girls are more likely than boys to be out of school. On average, a child whose mother has no education is twice as likely to be out of school as one whose mother has some education.

Growing demand for secondary education, but insufficient places

Gross enrolment ratios in secondary education climbed in all developing regions, but remain low in sub-Saharan Africa (30 percent), South and West Asia (51 percent) and the Arab States (66 percent). Low numbers of secondary places slow the achievement of universal primary education because this reduces the incentive to complete primary school. At the same time, increasing demand for secondary education results in competition with other levels for public expenditure.

Gender parity is not yet a reality

At the pre-primary level, the ratio of gross

enrolments among girls relative to those among boys rose slightly, from 0.96 to 0.97. Indeed, the ratio is higher at the pre-primary level than it is at the primary level (see below), probably because pre-primary enrolment ratios are relatively low and tend to reflect education mainly among the more affluent. Gender differences are usually less pronounced among this group than they are among the poor.

Worldwide, there are now 94 girls in primary school for every 100 boys, up from 92 per 100 in 1999. Of the 181 countries for which data are available up to 2004, about two thirds have achieved gender parity in primary education. The primary education gender gap in favour of boys has closed in only four of the 26 countries that had gross enrolment ratios below 90 in 2000.

Gender equality also remains an issue; stereotypes persist in learning materials, and, too often, the expectations of teachers differ with respect to girls and boys.

Literacy is an elusive target

Little progress has been made in achieving universal literacy. Some 781 million adults (one in five worldwide) lack minimum literacy skills. Two-thirds of these people are women. Literacy rates are low in South and West Asia (59 percent), sub-Saharan Africa (61 percent), the Arab States (66 percent) and the Caribbean (70 percent). Without concerted efforts to expand adult literacy programmes, the number of adult illiterates will have dropped by only 100 million by 2015.

Tackling exclusion: lessons from country experiences

Education for All requires an inclusive approach. Governments should identify the groups of children most likely never to enrol in school or to drop out. This is the first step in implementing policies to reach out to the excluded, overcome the barriers that deprive marginalised groups of learning opportunities and improve the quality and relevance of education.

Among measures to foster inclusion are the abolishment of school fees, the provision of income support and other financial incentives to poor households to reduce their reliance on child labour,

teaching in mother tongues, offering educational opportunities for disabled children, designing specific programmes for children affected by HIV/AIDS and ensuring that youth and adults get a second chance at education, including through non-formal programmes. Armed conflict and internal displacements require urgent interventions offering basic education services and medical and psychological care.

School fees have been reduced or abolished in several countries, but are still too common. This is a major obstacle to the participation of the poor in primary schooling.

Countries need *sound education plans* to overcome exclusion and improve education quality. Adequate public spending, expansion in secondary education and the hiring of trained and motivated teachers are three key aspects of such plans.

While the overall trend in *public education spending* is positive (increases of more than 30 percent in 20 countries), spending as a percentage of gross national product fell between 1999 and 2004 in 41 of the 106 countries for which data are available, though it increased in most of the others. Spending dropped appreciably in Latin America and the Caribbean and in South and West Asia. Public spending should focus on key areas for achieving EFA, including ECCE, inclusive education and adult literacy.

The EFA goals cannot be achieved without *training new teachers*. Sub-Saharan Africa needs to recruit between 2.4 million and 4 million teachers. In sub-Saharan Africa and in South and West Asia, there are too few women teachers to attract girls to enter and remain in school. Teacher absenteeism is a problem in many developing countries. Shorter pre-service training, more on-the-job practice, more professional development and financial incentives are effective strategies for retaining teachers in remote areas and other difficult teaching environments.

International support: making better use of aid

Donors and governments have begun to adopt new approaches to raising the effectiveness of aid. The Fast-Track Initiative was established in



Photo: OLIVIER CULMANN / TENDANCE FLOUE

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2002 to promote a global compact that would lead to the development of credible education-sector plans and to greater and more predictable external financial support. The initiative has become an important mechanism for dialogue among donors. However, there is still no global compact for achieving universal primary education. Since 2002, disbursements have totalled USD 96 million, but have only reached ten countries, though donors have increased their pledges significantly since 2005.

Leaders at the G8 Summit in St Petersburg in 2006 affirmed the fundamental importance of EFA as a contributor to national development and peace. Nonetheless, the external funding requirements for EFA, including provision for ECCE and adult literacy, are estimated at USD 11 billion a year, over three times the current spending.

Basic education benefited from an increase in overall donor aid to education between 2000 and

2004. Including funds channelled as direct budget support, aid to basic education for all low-income countries almost doubled, rising from USD 1.8 billion to USD 3.4 billion. This represented a steady share of roughly 55 percent of donor aid to the entire education sector in low-income countries over the period.

However, the flows of aid for basic education will be inadequate if the current share in total aid and the distribution across income groups are maintained. Of their total aid in 2003–2004, multilateral donors allocated 11.8 percent to education. Half of all bilateral donors allocate at least half of their education aid to middle-income developing countries. Almost half allocate less than one quarter directly to basic education. The share of total aid going to basic education must at least double and become more focused on low-income countries. Greater efforts will be needed to persuade donors to boost the volume and predictability of aid and to encourage the governments of low-income countries to assign priority to basic education.

The compelling case for ECCE

There is a strong case for public and private intervention. Well-designed ECCE programmes may complement the care children receive at home, significantly enhance children's well-being in the formative years and positively affect the future course of children's lives. Programmes that combine nutrition, healthcare, childcare and education have a positive impact on cognitive outcomes.

Learning begins before a child ever walks through a classroom door; participation in ECCE therefore also facilitates primary school enrolments and favours success in the first years of school. From an economic viewpoint, investment in early childhood programmes offers a payoff in terms of human capital. Early childhood programmes may reduce social inequality, and they may compensate for the vulnerability and disadvantage resulting from poverty and discrimination due to gender, race, ethnicity, caste, or religion.

Worldwide progress in ECCE

Enrolment in pre-primary education has tripled worldwide since 1970, and the environment in which care and education are provided to young children has

been rapidly evolving, too. Households are smaller; there are more working women, and new gender roles are emerging. About 80 percent of developing countries now have some sort of formally established maternity leave, although enforcement varies.

Meanwhile, the evidence suggests that the young children in the greatest need who are also most likely to benefit – those most exposed to malnutrition and preventable diseases, for example – are the least likely to be enrolled in pre-primary programmes. Though pre-primary gross enrolment ratios are rapidly improving in Latin America and the Caribbean and in the Pacific, they remain low in most of the rest of the developing world, but especially in sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States. Almost half the countries in the world have no formal programmes addressing the diverse needs in the health, nutrition, care and education of children 3 or under. Everywhere, children from poorer, rural households and children who are socially excluded (because they lack birth certificates, because their parents are uneducated, or because they belong to an ethnic minority, for instance) have less access to ECCE programmes than do children from more well off urban households.

Most developed countries in the West offer at least two years of free pre-primary education. Highly trained professionals are assisted by childcare workers and part-time volunteers. Elsewhere, many countries have implemented policies to expand and upgrade the ECCE workforce, but progress is uneven. In developing countries, ECCE staff typically possess inadequate education and training and tend to be poorly remunerated.

Most ECCE provision occurs through the public sector in developed and transition countries and in Latin America. The private sector is prominent in sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States, the Caribbean and East Asia. Few countries have established a national framework to coordinate ECCE programmes. Governments accord relatively low priority to spending on pre-primary education, and ECCE is not a priority among most donor agencies. In nearly all agencies, the allocation for pre-primary education is less than 10 percent of the allocation for primary education, and, in over half the agencies, the allocation is less than 2 percent of this sum.

Effective ECCE programmes: the transition

Successful early childhood programmes typically help ensure children's proper development by supporting and complementing the efforts of parents and other carers during the earliest years of the lives of the children, integrating educational activities with other services, notably healthcare, childcare and nutrition, and easing the transition as the children move from their families to programmes outside the home and eventually into primary schools.

Working with families and communities

One way to smooth the transition between home and school is by engaging with parents. Parents or other custodial carers outside the basic education system are the child's first educators, and, for the youngest age group, the home is the primary arena of care.

The past decade has seen an increase in the number of parenting programmes that are aimed at children 3 or under. Home-visiting programmes supply assistance to individual parents. Their help is generally positive, especially among at-risk families, because they usually focus on child development and raising the self-esteem of parents.

Local communities also play a key role in supporting young children and their families through home- or community-based childcare.

Centre-based early childhood programmes

The most common form of ECCE is centre-based provision, including pre-schools, for children from age 3 to school entry. Approaches that combine nutrition, healthcare, childcare and education are more effective in improving young children's well-being and development.

Centre-based programmes require pedagogies that take into account the specificity of children's development and the social context within which children live. Inclusive programmes build on traditional childcare practices, are suited to the ages of the children, accommodate children's diverse experiences and cultural backgrounds and seek to involve children who have special needs.

Early learning is most effective if it is imparted in the mother tongue of the children, though teaching in official languages remains the norm.

Programmes should address the circumstances of children who are disabled or who have been affected by armed conflict. The first exposure to organised teaching also represents an opportunity to challenge traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes through appropriately designed programmes.

Research shows that the single most important predictor of children's enhanced well-being and, therefore, of ECCE quality is interaction between children and staff and the extent of focus on the needs of the child. Adequate interaction requires reasonable working conditions, including low staff-children ratios and appropriate programme materials.

Easing the transition to primary school

ECCE of good quality is an end in itself, but it also represents a foundation for subsequent education. It is thus important to foster continuity between ECCE programmes and primary schooling. Continuity in parental involvement, staffing and curricula smoothes the transition of young children from their early childhood experiences and home and pre-primary environments to the primary education system. Steps to facilitate this transition need to be supported so that dropout rates, which are extremely high in developing countries, may be reduced, but also to help children equip themselves with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to realise themselves to their fullest personal potential, to interact effectively with the world and to become good citizens able to contribute to society.

Several countries have been integrating ECCE closely with the education system so as to ease the transition to primary school. These efforts may be described according to two main approaches: making children ready for primary school ('school readiness') and adapting primary schools to young children ('ready schools').

The school readiness approach stresses the importance of ECCE in promoting children's development and assuring that children are prepared to enter formal schooling. It seeks to identify the characteristics that children should display when they enter primary school so that they have a good chance of succeeding.

In addition to being positively associated with participation in pre-primary programmes and exposure to transition activities, school readiness is influenced by family income, the language spoken at home, the education attainment of parents and the size of the household. Differences between public and private pre-schools and urban and rural residence are also important.

There seems to be a consensus among researchers that *school readiness* encompasses development in five areas in which children differ greatly:

- physical well-being and motor development (measured in terms of health and growth);
- social and emotional development (ability to control one's own behaviour, ability to play and work with other children);
- approach to learning (enthusiasm, curiosity, persistence and temperament);
- language development (vocabulary, grammar and ability to learn and communicate);
- cognitive development and general knowledge (cognitive and problem-solving skills such as learning to observe and to note similarities and differences).

The concept of *ready schools*, meanwhile, focuses on the characteristics of a school environment that might facilitate or hinder learning. Researchers have identified several factors that may undermine readiness. Among these are overcrowded classrooms, the language gap (the language of instruction differs from the children's mother tongue), an absence of qualified, experienced first-grade teachers and inadequate learning materials. Addressing these issues has been particularly challenging in developing countries.

The relative importance of school readiness and ready schools is much debated. In any case, few programmes and few schools focus on the transition, and the relevant efforts of programmes and schools that do address the transition are usually part of more comprehensive initiatives, making it difficult to isolate and assess their specific impact.

Nonetheless, it seems clear that, to be more effective, early childhood and pre-primary services should reflect an awareness of the value

of integrating ECCE with primary education, establishing continuity in pre-primary and primary curricula and between home and school and carrying out special activities aimed at easing the entry into primary school by disadvantaged children who have not benefited from ECCE programmes.

Fostering strong ECCE policies

The broad scope of ECCE is captured in the policy objectives associated with it around the world:

- providing healthcare, immunisation, feeding and nutrition;
- supporting parents through information-sharing and parenting education;
- creating a safe environment so young children may play and socialise with their peers;
- compensating for disadvantage and fostering the resilience of vulnerable children;
- promoting school readiness and preparing children for primary school;
- providing custodial care for children of working parents and for other family members;
- strengthening communities and social cohesion.

In general, government policies typically focus on promoting school readiness by preparing children for primary school. There is much less emphasis on programmes for children 3 or under and on programmes aimed at achieving other EFA goals.

A more favourable policy environment for ECCE is therefore necessary. Although governments must face many difficulties in expanding and improving ECCE programmes, they may help shape this environment by ensuring that there are adequate resources, including public funding. Dedicated government partnerships with the private sector and international organisations or aid agencies may generate resources for important projects that may then be taken to scale.

Governments may also play an important role by designing sound policies. Effective national policies for early childhood carry benefits for an education system. The endorsement of government leaders would help place ECCE on the policy agenda. A consultative process might be instituted for the development of a national ECCE policy

for children from birth to age 8, specifying the administrative responsibilities and budgetary commitments across relevant sectors and levels of government.

Policies should address all six EFA goals by confronting the barriers to education, including educational deficiencies in rural areas, the shortage of trained staff and secondary schools and the lack of adult literacy programmes. Early childhood provision and aggressive, targeted education policies should become an integral component of poverty reduction strategies. Aligning ECCE policies with other national and sectoral development policies would allow resources to be leveraged. ECCE might be included in key government resource documents, such as national budgets, sectoral plans and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.

Even in a context of limited public resources, much may be done. A lead administrative body might be identified, and interagency mechanisms for decision making might be established. Public and private programmes might be monitored for quality. Public campaigns might promote ECCE, provide information to carers, help recruit teachers and encourage efforts to reach disadvantaged children and other children with limited access to ECCE. Guidelines and minimum standards on management, quality and financing might be defined and distributed. Coordination might be fostered among sectors and stakeholders so as to encourage public support. Eventually, a system for ongoing nationwide data collection to assess needs and outcomes might be organised.

EFA action now

Only nine years remain before 2015, the target year for achieving the EFA goals. Despite the progress in primary education, including among girls, too many children are still not in school, drop out, or do not acquire minimum skills. By neglecting the connections among early childhood, primary and secondary education and adult literacy, countries are missing opportunities to improve basic education, and, in the process, the prospects of children, youth and adults are suffering.

Nine recommendations warrant urgent policy attention:

1. Return to the comprehensive approach of the Dakar Framework for Action.
2. Act with urgency to enrol all children in school, expand adult literacy programmes and create opportunities for children in conflict and post-conflict situations.
3. Emphasise equity and inclusion.
4. Increase public spending and focus public spending more effectively.
5. Increase aid to basic education and allocate aid where it is most needed.
6. Move ECCE up domestic and international agendas.
7. Increase public financing for ECCE and target public financing more effectively.
8. Upgrade ECCE staff, especially in terms of qualifications, training and working conditions.
9. Improve the monitoring of ECCE.

The findings of the EFA *Global Monitoring Report 2007* remind us that there is no room for complacency. We have a collective responsibility to ensure quality education for all, a responsibility that begins by our providing strong foundations for children in the first years of life and on up to adulthood. Only through the adoption of a comprehensive approach that encompasses all the EFA goals and society's most fragile and vulnerable members might this mission be fulfilled.

Note

1. The Bernard van Leer Foundation contributed the following two background papers during the drafting of the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007*:
Arnold, C, Bartlett, K, Gowani, S and Merali, R (2006) "Is everybody ready?: Readiness, transition and continuity, reflections and moving forward."
Fabian, H and Dunlop, A-W (2006) "Outcomes of good practice in transition processes for children entering primary school."
These papers, in slightly modified form, will be published by the Bernard van Leer Foundation as *Working Papers early 2007*.