

Education



Lack of access to quality education, especially among the poorest and among girls, is preventing millions of people from escaping the cycle of extreme poverty around the world.

The Challenge

Lack of access to quality education is preventing millions of people from escaping the cycle of extreme poverty around the world. Most of the 59 million children of primary-school age still out of school are some of the poorest and hardest-to-reach. More than half of them are girls, and most are living in countries in conflict and in rural areas. Consequently, and despite crucial progress, the objective of achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) by 2030 will not be met.

Although many governments have eliminated the biggest obstacle to enrolment by abolishing school fees, other financial barriers such as

uniforms and exam fees still prevent many of the poorest children from going to school. For many poor families the long-term benefits of sending their children to school, especially their daughters are outweighed by the immediate benefit of sending them to work or keeping them at home to help with chores or marry them off sometimes to men old enough to be their father.

Many countries that have experienced a surge in primary school enrolment have not been able to sustain the quality of education by recruiting and training more teachers, expanding classrooms and buying materials. Sub-Saharan Africa has the greatest need for teachers; more than 1.4 million more teachers are still needed if we are to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Of the 138 countries with data in 2012, 24 (21 in sub-Saharan Africa) had a pupil/teacher ratio in primary education exceeding 40 to 1. Sub-Saharan African pupil teacher ratios remained over 40 to 1 at 42 to 1 in 2013. As a result, education standards across the region remain low and many children leave primary school without basic literacy and mathematics skills. Currently, 250 million primary school-aged children are unable to read or write, whether they are in school or not.

In countries where classrooms are crowded, supplies are scarce and the opportunities to move on to secondary school limited, many children drop out.

Gender parity is another challenge, especially in secondary education and has made little progress since 1999. In sub-Saharan Africa, the enrolment rate in secondary education for girls compared to boys has not risen enough since 1999: 88 girls are enrolled for every 100 boys. Early marriage and adolescent pregnancy are still a major obstacle to girls' access to education.

The Opportunity

Research shows that investment in education, with a focus on girls, may be one of the most effective in the developing world. By equipping a child with knowledge and skills, education delivers society-wide development returns.

Countries that increase the number of women with a secondary education by 1% could boost their annual per capita income by 0.3% according to last World Bank figures in 2011.

It has been estimated that if all women completed primary education, the under-five mortality rate would fall by 15% in low- and lower- middle-income countries, saving almost a million children's lives every year. Secondary education has an even greater impact: if all women in these countries completed secondary education, the under-five mortality rate would fall by 49% – saving 3 million children's lives annually. Furthermore, a study in the Gambia found that children who finished secondary education were seven times less likely to contract HIV as those who received little or no schooling. Education is also one of the central building blocks of a strong, cohesive society. According to a study of 100 countries, educating girls and reducing the gender gap can promote democracy.

In recent years, many governments have recognised the potential of education by making substantial new investments into the sector, including the poorest countries. Many sub-Saharan African countries, for example, allocated some of the billions of dollars freed up by debt cancellation towards education. Along with development assistance for education, debt savings helped send an additional 60 million children in sub-Saharan Africa to primary school for the first time between 2000 and 2013. Some major progress has also been made regarding gender equality as it is projected 69% of countries have achieved gender parity in primary education before and by 2015.

In addition to debt relief, donors have acknowledged that they have a vital ongoing role to play in supporting governments who commit to the goal of expanding access to education. At the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000, donors and developing countries agreed the goals of Education for All (EFA) and set 2015 as a target date for achieving Universal Primary Education. Even though this objective may have not been met, major progress has been achieved: 91% of children of primary school age are now enrolled in primary education, the largest increase being in sub-Saharan Africa, from 59% of primary adjusted net enrolment ratio in 1999 to 78% in 2013. Donors and developing countries also made a commitment: if developing countries committed

the political and financial resources to providing free and compulsory primary education and created credible and achievable education plans, donors would provide the technical know-how and extra funding needed to make it happen. The agreement was reaffirmed at three subsequent G8 summits, including the 2008 summit in Hokkaido.

These agreements gave rise to the first-ever global compact on education. Formerly known as the Fast Track Initiative, the Global Partnership for Education is a partnership between donors and developing countries to accelerate progress toward a quality primary education for all. The Global Partnership coordinates increased bilateral and multilateral funding for countries whose education plans have been technically vetted and endorsed by a team of policy experts and donor countries.

Partner countries made some notable progress towards universal primary education in the past few years. Since 2002, 51 million more children were enrolled in primary school in Global Partnership for Education countries worldwide. Despite these encouraging results, the Global Partnership faces persistent funding shortfalls. Donor leadership in education is needed for the Global Partnership to finance its multilateral fund, encourage bilateral support for education, and provide predictable funding for education plans in partner countries over the next three years in accordance to its strategic 3 year plan from 2015-2018.