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## Prospects for achieving education for all

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# Education for All - fünf Jahre nach Dakar

## Aus dem Inhalt:

- Chancen und Grenzen für das Erreichen der Dakar-Ziele
- Quantitative und qualitative Bestandsaufnahmen zu „Bildung für Alle“
- Education for All in Asien, Afrika und Lateinamerika
- Perspektiven für den Dakar-Prozess bis 2015

# Zeitschrift für internationale Bildungsforschung und Entwicklungspädagogik

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Christopher Colclough

# Prospects for achieving education for all

*Zusammenfassung: Der Autor berichtet über den Stand der Entwicklungen zur Erreichung der in Dakar formulierten Education For All (EFA) Ziele und ausgewählter Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Dabei konzentriert er sich auf die Aspekte Gender und Bildungsqualität.*

*Abstract: The author refers about the actual developments to achieve the Dakar-Education For All (EFA) goals and selected Millennium Development Goals (MDG). He concentrates on the aspects of Gender and quality.*

In the year 2005, the world will assess where it stands on reaching gender parity in primary and secondary education, the first milestone on an ambitious agenda made at the turn of the century for a 15-year period. First are the six Education for All (EFA) goals to which over 160 countries committed at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal (2000). They encompass all stages of learning, from early childhood and primary education to youth skills and adult literacy, with a cross-cutting emphasis on achieving good quality. Second are the Millennium Development Goals (MDG): they encompass universal primary education and gender equality, a fact underscoring the powerful links between education and poverty reduction. Without education, there can be no equitable social and economic development.

Although pressure to meet the basic learning needs of all came into the international limelight at the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand (1990), the movement gained fresh impetus in Dakar a decade later when a large coalition of governments, civil society stakeholders, bilateral and multilateral donors reiterated their commitments. Taking stock of progress over the 1990s, they recognized that results had fallen short of expectations. Conflict, economic crisis and the HIV/AIDS pandemic had even pulled the education record of some countries backwards. To bolster commitment and provide effective support to national efforts, participants in Dakar recommended that progress should be regularly monitored, an exercise that had not been conducted year on year in the 1990s.

This led to the publication by UNESCO of an annual independent monitoring report as an instrument to hold governments and the global community to account. By charting progress against the six Dakar goals, highlighting effective strategies, signalling emerging challenges and promoting international action, the report provides a valuable reference and advocacy tool for informing policy (UNESCO 2002; 2003; 2005).<sup>1</sup>

On current trends, the world is not on track to achieve the six Dakar goals by 2015. From the outset, however, it should be stressed that the EFA goals are achievable: policies exist to speed up progress. They typically involve legislation, resources and planning, underpinned by long-term, genuine commitment. Although national governments are the lead players in raising education provision, many countries also require much higher levels of support from the international community. This stands in line with the Dakar pledge that no country seriously committed to education will be thwarted by a lack of resources. This article will survey each of the six goals to sketch a global picture of progress. Emphasis will subsequently be placed on policies to secure gender equality and better quality education. If learners are to draw personal and social benefits from their education, basic conditions must be in place to ensure that they acquire both cognitive skills, and attitudes and values for responsible citizenship.

Monitoring implies the availability of accurate, timely and consistent data. Such data are also vital for evidenced-based education policy and for the rigorous evaluation of practice. Disaggregated data are needed to identify areas of greatest inequality and to facilitate better national and local planning. In practice, some major limitations exist in the coverage of data, making it difficult to monitor several dimensions of EFA both nationally and globally.

## The Dakar goals: review of progress

### *Goal 1: Expand early childhood care and education (ECCE)*

Research demonstrates that these programmes exert a strong influence on future school performance, particularly when they reach children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In the majority of countries, the gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary education is still below 50 %. Attendance rates are considerably higher for urban children than for those living in rural areas. Evidence from household surveys suggests that girls' attendance is higher than boys'. In many developing countries, ECCE programmes are staffed by teachers with low qualifications. As a result of unequal opportunities, a child in sub-Saharan Africa can expect only 0.3 years of pre-primary schooling, compared to 1.6 years in Latin America and the Caribbean and 2.3 years in North America and Western Europe.

### *Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education (UPE) by 2015*

There was much progress in enrolment during the 1990s, both over the whole decade (1990 – 2001) and its last third (1990 – 2001). By 2001, net enrolment ratios (NER)<sup>2</sup> had increased in nearly all the countries that had started the decade below 70 %. In twenty countries, NERs increased to beyond 90 % in 2001 and several of those that still had not reached 90 % in 2001 nevertheless had shown dramatic progress since 1998, with increases of over 10 percentage points (Burundi, Ethiopia, Guinea, Lesotho, Morocco, Mozambique and Sao Tome and Principe). On the other hand, in about one fifth of all countries providing data, NERs declined more than two percentage points between 1990 and 2001. In many cases these were Central and Eastern European or Central Asian countries, but also some in sub-Saharan Africa that experienced prolonged economic crisis during the decade.

The global pace of progress remains too slow to achieve UPE by 2015. If past trends continue, the world net enrolment ratio will be about 85 % in 2005 and 87 % in 2015. The number of out-of-school children is declining – but only slowly –, having fallen from 106.9 million in 1998 to 103.5 million in 2001. Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia together account for almost three quarters of these unenrolled children.

Once children are enrolled, it is crucial that they remain at school long enough to complete the curriculum and acquire basic skills. Yet large numbers of children are ‘pushed out’ by high costs of schooling or an unfriendly classroom environment, or are ‘drawn out’ to help in household economic activities before completing the fifth grade. The survival rate to grade 5 is below 75 % in thirty countries (out of 91 for which data are available) and below 66 % in half of the sub-Saharan African countries.

Furthermore, in most developing countries, a large proportion of primary-school graduates do not make the transition to the post-primary level, although at least some secondary education is compulsory in 144 of the 183 countries with

#### **Education For All (EFA) Jomtien goals**

1. Meeting Basic learning needs
2. Shaping the vision
3. Universalising access and promoting equity
4. Focussing on learning
5. Broadening the means and scope of basic education
6. Enhancing the environment for learning
7. Strengthening partnerships
8. Developing a supporting policy context
9. Mobilizing resources
10. Strengthening international solidarity

Fig. 1: Selections of World Declaration on Education For All and Framework for Action to meet basic learning needs (adopted by the World Conference on Education For All Meeting Basic Learning Needs. Jomtien, Thailand, 5 – 9 March 1990).

available data. Expanding the supply of secondary education is urgent in Latin America and the Caribbean as well as in many developing countries of East Asia and the Pacific.

A good synthetic measure of enrolment patterns is obtained by combining enrolment ratios by age at the different levels of the education system. Dramatic disparities prevail: a child in sub-Saharan Africa can expect to attend five to six fewer years of primary and secondary schooling than a child in Western Europe or the Americas.

### *Goal 3: Improve opportunities for youth and adult learning*

Efforts to raise the level of skills among youths and adults are marginal in the few developing countries that have conducted evaluations of skills development programmes. Progress remains difficult to assess on a global basis.

### *Goal 4: Improve literacy rates by 50 % by 2015*

According to the latest available estimates, there were nearly 800 million adult illiterates in 2002, representing 18 % of the adult population. Two facts stand out. First, almost

#### **EFA-Jomtien targets in different dimensions**

1. Expansion of early childhood care and developmental activities, including family and community interventions, especially for poor, disadvantaged and disabled children;
2. Universal access to, and completion of, primary education (or whatever higher level of education is considered as ‘basic’) by the year 2000;
3. Improvement in learning achievement such that an agreed percentage of an appropriate age cohort (e.g. 80 percent of 14 year-olds) attains or surpasses a defined level of necessary learning achievement;
4. Reduction of the adult illiteracy rate (the appropriate age group to be determined in each country), to, say, one-half its 1990 level by the year 2000, with sufficient emphasis on female literacy to significantly reduce the current disparity between male and female illiteracy rates;
5. Expansion of provisions of basic education and training in other essential skills required by youth and adults, with programme effectiveness assessed in terms of behavioural changes and impacts on health, employment and productivity;
6. Increased acquisition by individuals and families of the knowledge, skills and values required for better living and sound and sustainable development, made available through all education channels including the mass media, other forms of modern and traditional communication, and social action, with effectiveness assessed in terms of behavioural change.

Fig. 2: Selections of World Declaration on Education For All and Framework for Action to meet basic learning needs (adopted by the World Conference on Education For All Meeting Basic Learning Needs. Jomtien, Thailand, 5 – 9 March 1990).

**Education For All (EFA) Dakar goals**

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive *early childhood care and education*, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, 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 % improvement in levels of *adult literacy* by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
5. Eliminating *gender disparities* in primary and secondary education by 2015, and achieving *gender equality* in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.
6. Improving all aspects of the *quality of education* and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

**Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

Goal 2: Achieve UPE (Universal Primary Education)

*Target 3:* Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boy and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

*Target 4:* Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015

Fig. 3: The Dakar Framework and selected Millennium Development Goals (UNESCO 2003/2004)

two-thirds of adult illiterates are women. Second, severe illiteracy is concentrated in the three regions where school systems are the weakest: sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States and South and West Asia. Of the world's adult illiterates, 70 % of them live in nine countries belonging mostly to sub-Saharan Africa and East and South Asia, notably India, China, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Literacy rates tend to be higher among youth (the 15 – 24 age group) than adults because of the recent expansion of access to basic education. Youth literacy rates are above 70 % in all regions, ranging from 2 % in East Asia and the Pacific to 28 % in South and West Asia.

*Goal 5: Achieve gender parity at primary and secondary levels by 2005 and throughout education by 2015.*

Although many countries have made significant progress towards gender parity at primary and secondary levels over the past decade, large gaps remain, particularly in the Arab States, sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia. On current trends, almost 60 % of the 128 countries for which data are available are likely to miss reaching gender parity at primary and/or secondary levels by 2005. Girls' participation remains substantially lower than boys' (a gender parity index below 0.97) in seventy-one out of 175 countries at the primary level. Gender disparities become more extreme at secondary level and in higher education. Of eighty-three developing countries with data for all three levels, half have achieved gender parity at primary level, fewer than one-fifth at secondary and only four at tertiary.

*Goal 6: Improve the quality of education at all levels.*

Countries that are farthest from achieving goals one to five are also farthest from achieving goal six, the focus of the 2005 *Global Monitoring Report*. Several indicators provide information on quality. Public expenditure on education

represents a higher proportion of GDP (Gross Development Product) in rich countries, where the EFA goals are already achieved, than in poorer ones, where the coverage of under-resourced systems needs to be both expanded and improved. Spending has increased over the past decade in many developing countries, notably in East Asia and the Pacific and in Latin America and the Caribbean. Pupil/teacher ratios remain higher than is desirable in many countries of sub-Saharan Africa (regional median: 44:1) and South and West Asia (40:1). In many low-income countries, teachers do not meet even the minimum standards for entry into the profession, and many have not fully mastered the curriculum. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is severely undermining the provision of good education and contributing significantly to teacher absenteeism. Data from national and international test scores show that low achievement is widespread in most developing regions.

## The EFA Development Index (EDI)

The Report has developed a composite index – the Education for All Development Index – which measures the extent to which countries are meeting four of the six EFA goals: UPE, gender parity, literacy and quality. Several countries – including some of the poorest – sharply improved their EFA achievement levels between 1998 and 2001, including Liberia, Mozambique, Togo and Yemen, each of which saw an increase of 15 % or more between these two years. This indicates that poverty is not an unavoidable barrier to rapid progress towards EFA. On the other hand, massive educational deprivation continues to be concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States and South and West Asia.

- Forty-one countries (one-third of those for which the index can be calculated), all of them in North America and Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe, have achieved the goals or are close to doing so.

- Fifty-one countries have EDI values between 0.80 and 0.94.<sup>3</sup> In about half of these, mostly in Latin America, the quality of education is lagging behind the other goals.

- Thirty-five countries are far from meeting the goals, with EDI values below 0.80. Twenty-two of these countries are in sub-Saharan Africa. Three very high-population countries of South Asia – Bangladesh, India and Pakistan – are also in this group.

One of the greatest challenges facing large numbers of developing countries is both to expand education systems and to improve their quality. This involves implementing policies that address why children – in particular girls – are denied their right to education, and why learning achievement is so low after several years in school. The following sections review key policies for reducing gender disparities and improving the quality of education.

## Addressing the demand for education

The decision to send a child to school is taken in the home. Traditions, poverty and power-sharing in the family can seal a girl's fate. Early marriage, whether to lighten a family's burden or to secure a daughter's future, often cuts schooling short. Conflict, HIV/AIDS, disability, conflict and child labour practices put millions of children at an extreme disadvantage.

For many households, the cost of schooling is prohibitive. In spite of human rights instruments which commit states to provide free and compulsory education at primary level, school fees continue to be levied at primary level in at least 101 countries around the world. In more than three-quarters of the countries which are at risk of not achieving gender parity in primary schooling, fees were still charged at primary level in 2003. In recent years, a number of countries – including Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Uganda and Zambia – have introduced free primary education, resulting in dramatic enrolment hikes. In some cases (e.g. Kenya), this has led to a doubling or more of student numbers, placing huge pressure on the system in terms of classrooms, materials and teachers.

Families often depend on their children's labour. According to recent estimates, 18 % of children aged 5 – 14 are economically active, amounting to some 211 million children, about half of whom are girls. This figure is conservative: it does not include children engaged in domestic chores that do not lead to marketable output.

Policies and strategies to change these circumstances must stretch beyond the education system itself. First, broad legislative change is essential for gender equality to take root: family law reform and equal opportunities legislation can lay the foundations for more equitable societies. Second, carefully targeted policies must be introduced to shift the balance of incentives so that parents can afford to send their children to school. Scholarships, school-feeding programmes and cash transfers to families to cover the forgone wage of a working child have a documented impact on schooling. Brazil's national Bolsa Escola programme, for example, provides income subsidies to families with school-age children on condition that each child attends school at least 90 percent of the time.

Over two million children benefit from the scheme. A study from India reveals a 15 % increase in girls' attendance when the local school provided a midday meal.

Consequently, the state plays an important role in creating an enabling environment for promoting gender equality, investing in redistribution and mitigating the burden of external shocks, such as the effects of conflict, economic crisis and HIV/AIDS.

## The quality dynamic

At the same time, what happens in the school – the dynamics of the teaching and learning process – requires foremost policy attention. Strategies to improve the quality of learning must be gender aware: an education system in which there is gender inequality or discrimination against particular groups on ethnic or cultural grounds is not a high-quality system.

Focusing on quantitative data will not deliver EFA. In many parts of the world, an enormous gap prevails between the numbers who are graduating from schools and those among them who have managed to master a minimum set of cognitive skills. Results from international achievement tests (SACMEQ, PIRLS and PASEC)<sup>4</sup> show that in many low income countries, more than one third of children have limited reading skills after several years in school.

Governments of low-income countries face difficult choices. Much can be achieved, however, by making better use of existing resources and focusing on targeted interventions that respond to specific weaknesses.

First, investment in teachers is critical. Countries that have achieved high learning standards – the Republic of Korea and Cuba are two striking examples – have invested steadily in the teaching profession. Others, such as Egypt, have recently taken steps to increase expenditure on teacher salaries, reduce class sizes and improve training. The number of female teachers – crucial role models in countries where large gender gaps prevail – remains extremely low in many countries. In Africa, women hold only one-third or less of teaching posts. In some African countries, up to 60 % of primary school teachers have received no pedagogical training. Furthermore, teacher earnings are lower in real terms in 2000 than they were in 1970, and often too low to provide an acceptable standard of living. Training models for teachers often need to be reconsidered to strengthen school-based and pre- and in-service training rather than rely on lengthy, traditional, institutional pre-service training.

Second, commonly used styles and methods of teaching do not serve children well

Practitioners broadly agree that teacher-dominated pedagogy, which places students in a passive role is undesirable, yet it is the norm in the vast majority of classrooms in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere. Flagship programmes can be found in all regions<sup>5</sup> but they are often difficult and costly to scale up. Many educators advocate structured teaching – a middle way that combines direct instruction, guided practice and independent learning. Regular assessment are also crucial to better learning: countries such as Ghana, South Africa and Sri Lanka have adopted a more comprehensive system of

assessments to complement the formal exams

Third, students are not spending enough time learning. The broadly agreed benchmark of 850 – 1,000 hours of instruction per year for all pupils is not reached in many countries. In some cases, the average annual number of schooling hours has decreased sharply over two decades, reflecting the pressure of meeting higher demand for schooling under tight resource constraints. Test scores clearly show that the amount of class time spent on mathematics, science and language strongly affects performance in these subjects.

Fourth, the quality of learning materials strongly affects what teachers can do. National book policies can provide a framework for the growth and development of local publishers and enable schools to choose which books they use.

Fifth, schools can be given greater freedom provided that accountability frameworks are well defined

Head teachers and principals can influence the quality of schools strongly. Generally, accountability at the school level needs to be mirrored by greater central accountability: governments should publish information on expenditure and resource levels disaggregated to district levels and made available locally.

Sixth, relationships among different parts and aspects of the education sector can be exploited to help improve quality

ECCE, literacy and gender sensitive policies in education directly improve its quality and outcomes.

## Resources for better learning

Research evidence clearly suggests that additional resources do make a difference in developing countries, especially when they are invested in more teachers, more textbooks and more learning time. In countries with the highest pupil ratios, barely one third of students who start primary school reach grade 5. At the same time, the international community must provide stronger support to the EFA process. Bilateral aid currently stands at \$1.5 billion per year. Although recent pledges suggest that this figure could reach \$3.5 billion in the next five years, this is still far short of the estimated additional \$5.6 billion needed to reach the objectives of universal primary education and gender parity alone by 2015. The likely shortage of resources places a particular premium on ensuring that aid is used as effectively as possible and that it is directed towards the countries that need it most.

## Conclusion

Quantity and quality must be considered as compliments, not substitutes in the drive to achieve EFA. Successful qualitative reforms require prime attention to the teaching profession, a strong leading role by government and policy continuity over time. Many reforms to improve quality are self-financing: they will result in more efficient systems, with lower drop-out and repetition rates.

Achieving the education for all goals is both a moral and social imperative. The right to education is enshrined in major conventions and accepted internationally. The two most

recent conventions – on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) and on the Rights of the Child (1990) – contain the most comprehensive set of legally enforceable commitments concerning both rights to education and to gender equality. When countries comply with these rights, they are also acting in their own economic and social interest. Study after study has demonstrated the positive impact of girls' education on economic growth, fertility rates, health and farm productivity. It is the single most effective preventive weapon against HIV/AIDS. This is why achieving all the MDG goals – reducing poverty, improving health, sanitation and environmental management – depends to a large extent on giving children, youth and adults learning opportunities enabling them to shape the future.

### Annotations

1 The Reports are online at [www.efareport.unesco.org](http://www.efareport.unesco.org); for more information: [efareport@unesco.org](mailto:efareport@unesco.org).

2 Enrolment of the official age group for a given level of education, expressed as a percentage of the population in that age group.

3 The EDI value can range from 0 to 1. The closer the value is to 1, the less distant a country is from meeting the goals, and hence the greater its EFA achievement.

4 SACMEQ = Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality; PIRLS = Progress in International Reading Literacy Study; PASEC = Programme for the Analysis of the Educational Systems of CONFEMEN Countries (it is a programme for francophone Africa countries)

5 Examples include Escuela Nueva in Colombia, Egypt's Community Schools, Mali's Convergent Pedagogy and schools run by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee.

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Christopher Colclough, born 1946, received his PhD in economics from Cambridge University; director of 2002, 2003/4 and 2005 Education for All Global Monitoring Reports. A long time professor of Economics at the Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex), he has served as an adviser on education policies to many governments in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. He is the principal author of "Achieving Education for All in Africa: Costs, Commitment and Gender" (London: Ashgate 2003). From January 2005, Professor Colclough will become the inaugural Director of the Centre for Commonwealth Education, University of Cambridge.