

Embargo 19 January 2010

## **Financial crisis threatens to set back education worldwide, UNESCO report warns**

New York, 19 January - The aftershock of the global financial crisis threatens to deprive millions of children in the world's poorest countries of an education, the 2010 Education for All *Global Monitoring Report* warns. With 72 million children still out of school, a combination of slower economic growth, rising poverty and budget pressures could erode the gains of the past decade.

“While rich countries nurture their economic recovery, many poor countries face the imminent prospect of education reversals. We cannot afford to create a lost generation of children who have been deprived of their chance for an education that might lift them out of poverty,” said UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova.

The Global Monitoring Report, developed annually by an independent team and published by UNESCO, assesses global progress towards the six Education for All goals to which over 160 countries committed themselves in 2000.

The 2010 Report, *Reaching the marginalized*, charts some spectacular advances in education over the past decade, a striking contrast with the “lost decade” of the 1990s. Since 1999, the number of children not attending school has fallen by 33 million — and more children are completing a full cycle of primary education.

Sub-Saharan Africa has increased enrolment at five times the rate achieved in the 1990s, with countries such as Benin and Mozambique registering rapid advances. In South and West Asia, the number of children out of school has been more than halved, partly through policies aimed at getting more girls into school. In India, the number of children not in school fell by almost 15 million in just two years, from 2001 to 2003.

The gender gap has also narrowed. In the space of one primary school generation, Senegal has moved from 85 girls for every 100 boys to an equal number of girls and boys.

Numbers such as these dispel the myth that poor countries are unable to achieve rapid progress in education. But *Reaching the marginalized* warns that many countries are likely to fall far short of the targets adopted by governments in 2000, because of the failure of governments to address inequalities and of donors to deliver on pledges.

Setbacks in education will have wider consequences, too. With a major international summit planned on the UN's development targets — the Millennium Development Goals — in 2010, the report points out that lost opportunities for education will act as a brake on economic growth, poverty reduction, and progress in health and other areas.

The report's authors identify sub-Saharan Africa as an area for priority action. With fiscal deficits rising across the region, education spending plans could face painful adjustments. Education systems across the region could be deprived of around US\$4.6 billion per year in public spending in 2009 and 2010 as a direct result of the crisis.

The report urges rich countries and the Group of 20 to scale-up the concessional aid required to avoid damaging budget adjustments in the poorest countries.

The report estimates that donors will have to bridge a financing gap of US\$16 billion a year to meet the goal of universal primary education by 2015. These numbers reflect governments' ongoing neglect of the need to address extreme inequalities; the world will only get all its children into school by putting the marginalized at the centre of education policy.

## **FALLING SHORT OF THE GOALS**

With less than five years to the 2015 target date, the Global Monitoring Report warns that the window of opportunity for getting on track is closing. Among the global indicators highlighted as a cause for concern:

- On current trends, 56 million primary school age children will still be out of school in 2015
- Another 71 million adolescents are currently not at school
- Gender disparities remain deeply engrained, with 28 countries across the developing world having nine or fewer girls in primary school for every ten boys.
- Girls still account for 54% of the children out of school– and girls not in primary school are far less likely than boys ever to attend school
- 10.3 additional teachers will be needed worldwide to achieve the goal of universal primary education by 2015.
- There has been little progress towards the goal of halving adult illiteracy – a condition that affects 759 million people, two-thirds of them women
- Child malnutrition remains a major barrier to progress in education, with 178 million children aged 0-5 years old affected and the numbers rising
- Far too many young people emerge from primary school unable to read or write. In some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, young adults with five years of primary schooling have a 40% chance of being illiterate.

The report cautions that reality may look worse than the picture provided in national data. Using household survey data analysis, it presents evidence that school records overstate the number of primary school age children in school by as much as 30%.

## **A COLLECTIVE AID FAILURE**

There has been a collective failure by the donor community to act on the pledge made in 2000 that 'no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by lack of resources':

- **A financing gap** of US\$16 billion a year must be bridged to reach the Education for All goals;
- **Rich countries are exaggerating** how much aid they have provided to help poor countries cope with the financial crisis;
- **The Fast Track Initiative is not working:** the principal global education aid coordination body needs fundamental reform.

Aid commitments to basic education, having stagnated from 2004, fell by more than one-fifth in 2007. The aid budgets of three major donors – France, Germany and Japan – continue to reflect a relative neglect of basic education, as they commit over half of their education aid to post-primary levels. Spain, on the other hand, has led the way by increasing its aid to basic education by 78% since 1999.

The report estimates that low-income countries could raise an additional US\$ 7 billion per year, or 0.7% of GDP, by increasing domestic resources and allocating more to education. However, even if governments maximize their efforts to increase domestic spending on education, **the financing gap** is estimated by the Global Monitoring Report to be US\$16 billion annually for 46 low-income countries. Previous estimates have underestimated the cost of achieving core education goals, partly because they have failed to count the additional spending needed to reach deprived groups.

The UNESCO report acknowledges that increasing aid will be challenging for donors in a period of acute budget stress. Aid levels will have to rise markedly, however, to close the Education for All financing gap of US\$16 billion: current aid for basic education in the 46 countries covered amounts to just US\$2.7 billion.

The authors of the report call on the UN Secretary General to convene a high-level pledging conference in 2010 to address the financing shortfall.

**Wealthy countries and international financial institutions have been misrepresenting** their support for developing countries, using ‘smoke and mirrors’ aid reporting. “Rich countries have mobilized a financial mountain to stabilize their financial systems and protect vital social and economic infrastructure, but they have provided an aid molehill for the world’s poor,” said the Global Monitoring Report’s director, Kevin Watkins.

**The centrepiece of multilateral aid for education needs fundamental reform.** The Fast Track Initiative has achieved some significant results, but the EFA Global Monitoring Report identifies wide-ranging problems that have diminished its effectiveness. Payout rates are very low, developing countries have a weak voice in governance, the private sector’s role is minimal and countries affected by conflict are poorly served.

The Report calls for fundamental reform of the Fast-Track Initiative. Drawing on the experience of global health funds, the authors call for more effective multilateral approaches in education, with a focus on closing financing gaps, raising learning achievement and strengthening equity.

In addition, **aid effectiveness** needs to be improved to fix problems with aid predictability, donor coordination and donors' failure to use national financial management systems.

Donors also need to adopt more flexible approaches in order to scale up support to **conflict-affected countries**, which account for one-third of children not in school, but less than one-fifth of aid to education.

## **FIGHTING 'EDUCATION POVERTY' IS KEY TO BETTER PROGRESS**

Extreme and persistent inequalities linked to poverty, gender, ethnicity and language are holding back progress in education, wasting human potential and undermining prosperity. Lost opportunities for education hinder economic growth as well as efforts to reduce poverty and improve health.

Using a new measurement tool – the Deprivation and Marginalization in Education data set – the report explores the extent of acute disadvantage, using an '**education poverty**' threshold of four years in school, the minimum required to acquire basic literacy, for young adults in the 17-22 year old age range. The report identifies 22 countries with 30% or more young adults below the four-year threshold, and 11 countries in sub-Saharan Africa that have 50% or more below the threshold.

The Global Monitoring Report data set reveals stark differences in education opportunity within countries:

- *Being born into a poor household significantly raises the risk of deprivation.* In the Philippines, there is a four-year education gap between the richest and poorest households. The gap in India is seven years.
- *Gender interacts with wealth and location.* In Nigeria, the average youth aged 17-22 has received seven years of education. For poor rural Hausa females, that figure drops to less than 6 months.
- *Disparities within countries are often bigger than disparities between countries.* In Mexico, one quarter of the young adults in the southern state of Chiapas have fewer than four years of education — a figure that falls to 3% for the Federal District.
- *Some groups face acute disadvantage.* In Kenya, 51% of male Somali pastoralists aged 17-22 have less than 2 years in school, rising to 92% for females.
- *Language and ethnicity often reinforce marginalization.* Turkey has made rapid progress in education, but Kurdish-speaking females from poor households average around three years in school, which is on a par with the national average for Chad.

Marginalization in education is fuelled by structural disadvantages, bad policies, and neglect by political leaders. The report identifies policies that successfully counteract persistent inequalities in education, including:

- *Improving accessibility and affordability.* Governments need to go beyond removing formal school fees for basic education to cutting informal charges,

and providing targeted incentives for disadvantaged groups. An innovative programme in Cambodia, for example, which supplies grants to the families of girls who reach the final grade of primary school on the condition that they then go on to secondary school, is estimated to have increased enrolment among participants by 30%.

- *Strengthening the learning environment.* Governments need to ensure that marginalized children have access to highly skilled teachers, by offering incentives for deployment to remote rural areas and disadvantaged urban areas, and by recruiting teachers from ethnic minorities. The experience of Bolivia, where inter-cultural bilingual teaching has expanded rapidly since the mid-1990s, shows how such reforms can help to overcome language-related disadvantages, while at the same time challenging discriminatory social attitudes.
- *Expanding entitlements and opportunities.* Education strategies need to be integrated into wider anti-marginalization policies. Social protection policies, including cash transfers, are a key way to counteract poverty and vulnerability. Half of the households that receive cash under an Ethiopian programme, for example, report being able to keep children in school for longer as a result. Legal entitlements also have a role to play, and are most effective when backed by political mobilization, as demonstrated by the success of New Zealand's kōhanga reo Māori language movement. Redistributing public spending more fairly is also crucial, and in Brazil this has been a central pillar of wider strategies aimed at breaking the links between poverty, inequality and marginalization in education.

\*\*\*\*\*

The full report is available online at:

<http://www.unesco.org/en/efareport/reports/2010-marginalization/embargo-media/>  
username & password = media2010

Photos: [www.unesco.org/en/photos/efa\\_2010](http://www.unesco.org/en/photos/efa_2010)

A b-roll is also available.

Please contact Carole Darmouni,  
UNESCO Bureau of Public Information,  
tel: +33 1 45 68 17 38; [c.darmouni@unesco.org](mailto:c.darmouni@unesco.org)

**For more information or interviews contact:**

Agnes Bardon  
UNESCO Bureau of Public Information  
Tel: +33 1 45 68 17 64; [a.bardon@unesco.org](mailto:a.bardon@unesco.org)

Or

Sue Williams  
UNESCO Bureau of Public Information

Tel: +33 1 45 68 17 06; [s.williams@unesco.org](mailto:s.williams@unesco.org)

**In New York:**

Marisol Sanjines

Tel: +1 646 4201 8036; [m.sanjines@unesco.org](mailto:m.sanjines@unesco.org)