

THE PATH TOWARDS TRULY UNIVERSAL QUALITY EDUCATION

INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT ATD FOURTH WORLD

Current context

With just two years to go until their deadlines, progress reports on the education-related targets of the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All goals set in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000 have given a mixed picture. The drive to get more children into school is losing momentum, and on current trends, the goal of universal primary education (MDG Goal 2 - Target 2A) by 2015 will be missed, according to the EFA Global Monitoring Report - Youth and skills: Putting education to work (GMR 2012) .

Early childhood care and education (EFA goal 1) has progressed very slowly, despite the indisputable importance of early child development and preparation for primary school. More than half the world's children do not receive pre-primary education because pre-schools cost too much for those who need them most.

Although child enrollment rates for primary school have increased, the quality of education received has not improved (EFA goal 6) as demonstrated by the 40 percent of the 650 million primary school age children who fail to attain minimum learning standards or who stop attending before reaching grade 4.

Among those who achieve a secondary school level, one fifth (200 million) youths aged 15 to 24 do not complete their studies and therefore lack the skills they need to find work (EFA goal 3). The world will miss the target of halving adult illiteracy 2015 (EFA Goal 4). This phenomenon works to support the idea that poverty is multidimensional and has many of its roots in issues that are missed by income-based measures.

Whether they live in low, middle, or high income countries, children from marginalized households are more likely to enter late and to drop out early. Children who leave school early are or who repeat a grade tend to be from poor or rural households, and have significantly lower primary education attendance rates. For this reason, success in the area of education can only be achieved if targets are met by all income levels, particularly the lowest quintile.

The Education First Initiative, sponsored by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon brings forward the vital contribution of parents: "When you ask parents what they want for their children – even in war zones and disaster areas - they seek the same things first: education. Parents want their children in school." We must then ask what factors contribute to the creation of inequity and learning gaps and what can we do to address them?

Key Factors Leading to Unequal Access to Education

Two regional consultations on education in Africa and Asia-Pacific organized by UNESCO and UNICEF have highlighted the need to shift the focus from access to education to *equitable learning*, which goes beyond literacy and numeracy to “include cognitive and non-cognitive skills, psychosocial skills and critical thinking”¹ for children and youth of all demographic groups. Moreover, on governance, the attention has widened from issues of financing and budgets to the creation of education systems that are more accountable to communities and that develop structured spaces for partnerships with all stakeholders, including communities and parents.

The International Movement ATD Fourth World maintains that Universal Access to Quality **Education should be a stand-alone goal** with cross-cutting features among all other goals. Moreover, through its own participatory research in communities afflicted by poverty, it highlights below four particular factors that inhibit the realization of truly universal *quality* education:

1. Hidden financial barriers to equitable access to learning
2. Lack of conducive environments for parents and communities to become partners in the education of their children
3. Educational programmes that are not context-appropriate
4. The pervasive discrimination of disadvantaged students and parents by school teachers and staff, as well as their fellow students

Proposed targets

Removing hidden barriers to equitable access to learning

- Ensure that all children have access to quality education, including pre-primary care through secondary education, taking into consideration the indirect financial costs of education (uniforms, books, transportation, school meals, etc.) and providing financial support when required to offset these costs.

Creating a conducive environment for a partnerships between parents and schools

- Recognize that parents, regardless of their social status, are stakeholders in children’s educational success. Institute measures that involve all parents, including those of the lowest income quintiles, in setting of budgets and curricula for their children’s schools, to ensure the development of context-appropriate education that reflects ethnic and rural/urban differences.

Developing context-appropriate education

- Ensure every child completes secondary education with the skills, including technical and vocational, needed for work.
- Design curricula that recognize alternative pathways to quality education (i.e. apprenticeships and internships) as legitimate sources of knowledge and skill attainment.

Eliminating the pervasive discrimination of disadvantaged students and parents by school teachers and

1 Outcomes and Recommendations of the thematic consultation in the Asia-Pacific, Bangkok, Thailand, 28 February-1 March 2013, co-organized by UNICEF and UNESCO.

staff, as well as by fellow students

- Introduce measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination and stigma. Train teachers and school staff to understand the effects of extreme poverty and other manifestations of social exclusion, and equip them with the knowledge to provide meaningful support to students who struggle.

Proposed Process-linked Indicators

On removing hidden barriers to equitable access to learning

- Share of annual household expenditure per child on pre-primary education and care, disaggregated by income quintile.
- Share of annual household expenditure per child on secondary costs to education (transportation, materials, administrative, etc.), disaggregated by income quintile
- Proportion of pupils from the lowest income quintile in grade 1 who attended preschool
- Net primary enrolment ratio of school-age children in the lowest income quintile

On creating a conducive environment for a partnerships between parents and schools

- Proportion of parents who do not communicate with school teachers over the course of an academic year, giving particular attention to parents of the lowest income quintile.
- Existence of mechanisms and programmes that create partnerships between the school and the local community and parents, with special attention to the lowest income quintile

On developing context-appropriate education

- Proportion of students who go on to enroll in technical or vocational education, particularly those in the lowest income quintile²
- Number of institutions of ethnic, regional, and/or linguistic minority recognized or given public support.³
- Average class size disaggregated by regional and socioeconomic group, with particular focus on the lowest income quintile.

On eliminating the pervasive discrimination of disadvantaged students and parents by school teachers and staff, as well as by fellow students

- Proportion of education institutions at all levels teaching human rights and promoting understanding among population groups
- Prevalence/incidence of crimes, including hate crimes occurring in schools⁴

² EFA Global Monitoring Report 2012, 364

³ Human Rights Indicators: A Guide to Measurement and Implementation, 2012, OHCHR

⁴ Ibid