

Education for All

Literacy for life

Summary

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ED.2005/PI/01

Previous EFA Global Monitoring Reports

2005. Education for All – THE QUALITY IMPERATIVE
2003/4. Gender and Education for All – THE LEAP TO EQUALITY
2002. Education for All – IS THE WORLD ON TRACK?

Published in 2005 by the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
7, Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France
Graphic design by Sylvaine Baeyens
Iconographer: Delphine Gaillard
Printed by Graphoprint Paris
©UNESCO 2005
Printed in France

The Report at a glance

→ Progress towards Education for All

Steady progress has been made since 1998, especially towards universal primary education (UPE) and gender parity among the poorest countries, but the pace is insufficient for the goals to be met in the remaining ten years to 2015.

Encouraging trends represent considerable achievements in many low-income countries:

- Primary-school enrolments are up sharply in both sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, with nearly 20 million new students in each region.
- Globally, 47 countries have achieved UPE (out of 163 with data available).
- Projections show that 20 additional countries (out of 90 with the relevant data) are on track to achieve UPE by 2015; 44 countries are making good progress but are unlikely to achieve the goal by 2015.
- Girls' primary enrolments have also risen rapidly, especially in some of the lowest-income countries of sub-Saharan Africa, and South and West Asia.
- Gender and educational quality measures are increasingly visible in national education plans.
- Public spending on education has increased as a share of national income in about 70 countries (out of 110 with data).
- Aid for basic education more than doubled between 1999 and 2003 and, following the G8 summit, could rise to US\$3.3 billion per year by 2010.
- The Fast Track Initiative has emerged as a key coordinating mechanism for aid agencies.

Major Education for All challenges remain:

- *UPE is not assured:*
 - About 100 million children are still not enrolled in primary school, 55% of them girls.
 - 23 countries are at risk of not achieving UPE by 2015, as their net enrolment ratios are declining.
 - Primary-school fees, a major barrier to access, are still collected in 89 countries (out of 103 surveyed).
 - High fertility rates, HIV/AIDS and armed conflict continue to exert pressure on education systems in the regions with the greatest EFA challenges.
- *The 2005 gender parity target has been missed by 94 countries out of 149 with data:*
 - 86 countries are at risk of not achieving gender parity even by 2015.
 - 76 out of 180 countries have not reached gender parity at primary level, and the disparities are nearly always at the expense of girls.
 - 115 countries (out of 172 with data) still have disparities at secondary level, with boys being under-represented in nearly half, in marked contrast to the primary level.
- *Quality is too low:*
 - Enrolments in early childhood care and education programmes have remained static.
 - Fewer than two-thirds of primary-school pupils reach the last grade in 41 countries (out of 133 with data).
 - In many countries, primary teacher numbers would have to increase by 20% a year to reduce pupil/teacher ratios to 40:1 and to achieve UPE by 2015.
 - Many primary-school teachers lack adequate qualifications.
- *Literacy gets short shrift:*
 - 771 million people aged 15 and above live without basic literacy skills.
 - Governments and aid agencies give insufficient priority and finance to youth and adult literacy programmes.
- *Aid for basic education is still inadequate:*
 - At US\$4.7 billion in 2003, bilateral aid to education – 60% of which still goes to post-secondary education – has increased since 1998 but remains well below the 1990 high of US\$5.7 billion.
 - Total aid to basic education accounts for only 2.6% of Official Development Assistance; within this category, adult literacy's share is minuscule.
 - While aid to basic education will likely increase in line with overall aid, its share would have to double to reach the estimated US\$7 billion a year necessary just to achieve UPE and gender parity.
 - Disproportionate volumes of bilateral aid go to middle-income countries with relatively high primary enrolments.
 - By mid-2005, the Fast Track Initiative had resulted in pledges of only US\$298 million.

→ Literacy

Literacy is:

- A right still denied to nearly a fifth of the world's adult population.
- Essential to achieving each of the EFA goals.
- A societal and an individual phenomenon, with attention needed to both dimensions.
- Crucial for economic, social and political participation and development, especially in today's knowledge societies.
- Key to enhancing human capabilities, with wide-ranging benefits including critical thinking, improved health and family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention, children's education, poverty reduction and active citizenship.

The literacy challenge has absolute and relative dimensions, particularly affects the poor, women and marginalized groups, and is much greater than conventional measures indicate:

- In absolute numbers, those without literacy skills are mainly in sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, and East Asia and the Pacific. Prospects for meeting the 2015 goal hinge largely on progress in the 12 countries where 75% of those without literacy skills live.
- In relative terms, the regions with the lowest literacy rates are sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, and the Arab States, all with literacy rates around only 60%, despite increases of more than 10 percentage points since 1990.
- Illiteracy is associated to a significant extent with extreme poverty.
- Women are less literate than men: worldwide, only 88 adult women are considered literate for every 100 adult men, with much lower numbers in low-income countries such as Bangladesh (62 per 100 men) and Pakistan (57 per 100 men).
- 132 of the 771 million people without literacy skills are aged 15 to 24, despite an increase in this group's literacy rate to 85%, from 75% in 1970.
- Direct testing of literacy suggests that the global challenge is much greater than the conventional numbers, based on indirect assessments, would indicate, and that it affects both developed and developing countries.

The literacy challenge can be met only if:

- Political leaders at the highest level commit themselves to action.
- Countries adopt explicit literacy policies to:
 - Expand quality primary and lower-secondary education;
 - Scale up youth and adult literacy programmes;
 - Develop rich literate environments.

Scaling up literacy programmes for youth and adults requires:

- Active government responsibility for adult literacy policy and financing as part of education sector planning.
- Clear frameworks to coordinate public, private and civil society provision of literacy programmes.
- Increased budgetary and aid allocations. Literacy programmes receive a mere 1% of the education budget in many countries. An additional US\$2.5 billion a year to 2015 will likely be needed to make significant progress towards the Dakar literacy goal.
- Basing programmes on an understanding of learners' demands, especially their language preferences and their motivations for attending class, in consultation with local communities.
- Curricula that build on these demands, with clearly stated learning objectives and the provision of adequate learning materials.
- Adequate pay, professional status and training opportunities for literacy educators.
- Appropriate language policies, as most countries facing stark literacy challenges are linguistically diverse. The use of mother tongues is pedagogically sound but must offer a smooth transition to learning opportunities in regional and official languages.

Developing literate environments and literate societies requires sustained attention to:

- Language policies.
- Book publishing policies.
- Media policies.
- Access to information.
- Policies to get books and reading materials into schools and homes.

Acquiring, improving and using literacy skills happens at all levels of education, and in multiple formal and non-formal contexts. Achieving each of the EFA goals depends strongly on policies that foster literate societies and set high standards for literacy, the foundation for further learning.

Introduction

When 164 governments adopted the six Education for All (EFA) goals in 2000, they espoused a holistic vision of education spanning learning from the first years of life through adulthood. In practice, achieving good-quality universal primary education (UPE) and gender parity, two of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, has dominated attention. As the United Nations Literacy Decade unfolds, the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006* aims to shine a stronger policy spotlight on the more neglected goal of literacy – a foundation not only for achieving EFA but, more broadly, for reaching the overarching goal of reducing human poverty.

Literacy is a foundation of learning. While schooling is the principal route for acquiring reading, writing and numeracy skills, an exclusive focus on formal education for children ignores stark realities: first, too many pupils leave school without acquiring minimum literacy skills; second, one-fifth of the world's adult population – 771 million adults – live without the basic learning tools to make informed decisions and participate fully in the development of their societies. Women form the vast majority, heightening their vulnerability and the chance that their daughters will not benefit from education. Tackling the global literacy challenge is a moral and development imperative. It is rendered all the more urgent by globalization, which is further increasing demand for literacy in multiple languages.

In line with the Report's broad monitoring mandate, Part I of this summary assesses overall progress, including towards quality universal primary education and gender parity, highlighting national strategies for speeding up progress in the decade to 2015. Part II defines and makes the case for literacy, tracing its emergence as a human right that confers profound benefits upon individuals and societies. Part III paints a detailed map of the enormous literacy challenge, focusing on the most vulnerable regions, countries and groups. It also chronicles the remarkable transition of many societies to widespread literacy: 150 years ago, only 10% of the world's adult population was literate, compared with 80% today. How was this achieved and what lessons does it suggest for moving towards universal literacy, essential in today's knowledge societies?

Drawing on these insights, Part IV calls for a three-pronged policy approach to literacy, encompassing the achievement of UPE, the scaling up of youth and adult learning programmes, and the development and enrichment of literate environments. Part IV also discusses essential features of sound policy and the role of government in scaling up adult literacy programmes. Part V assesses international commitments to basic education, including literacy, in light of the considerable expectations surrounding pledges in 2005 to increase aid substantially over the next five years.

This fourth edition of the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* is based on extensive research, commissioned papers available on the website (www.efareport.unesco.org) and consultations – including online – with literacy experts around the world. ■

■ Dakar EFA 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 per cent 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 2005, 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 related to education

- Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education.
Target 3. Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys 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 at all levels of education no later than 2015.

■ The United Nations Literacy Decade 2003–2012

Expected outcomes:

- Significant progress towards the 2015 Dakar goals (3, 4 and 5), in particular, a recognizable increase in the absolute numbers of those who are literate among women (accompanied by reduction in gender disparities); in excluded pockets in countries that are otherwise considered to have high literacy rates; and in regions of greatest need (sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and E-9 countries).
- Attainment by all learners, including children in school, of a mastery level of learning in reading, writing, numeracy, critical thinking, positive citizenship values and other life skills.
- Dynamic literate environments, especially in schools and communities of the priority groups, so that literacy will be sustained and expanded beyond the Literacy Decade.
- Improved quality of life (poverty reduction, increased income, improved health, greater participation, citizenship awareness and gender sensitivity) among those who have participated in the various educational programmes under EFA.

- Progress was steady but insufficient from 1998 to 2002/2003
 - Very rapid progress was made in countries with the lowest indicators
 - Access to primary school remains an obstacle
 - Fees at primary level are still a major barrier to progress in nearly 90 countries
 - Low learning achievement is widespread

Part I. Education for All – progress and prospects

- The number of secondary-school students has risen four times faster than the number of primary-school students since 1998
- The 2005 gender parity goal has been missed, and eighty-six countries are at risk of not achieving gender parity even by 2015
- HIV/AIDS threatens EFA achievement in Africa
- New teachers are needed in big numbers
- Low-cost school health and nutrition interventions improve learning and need more attention
- Public spending on education increased as a share of national income in two-thirds of countries between 1998 and 2002

Each year, the *Global Monitoring Report* tracks progress towards the six goals agreed by 164 countries at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000. This year it draws on data from the 2002/2003 school year to report on change since 1998 and to project which countries are likely to achieve the goals of UPE, gender parity in primary and secondary education and a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by the target year of 2015. Although these projections may not fully reflect the impact of recent changes in policies, they are a useful monitoring tool.

Across the board, progress over the five years was steady but insufficient if the EFA goals are to be achieved or to come within much closer reach than they are today. All the evidence points to a continued need for an intensive policy focus on sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, and the Arab States, along with least developed countries in other regions. National strategies that concentrate on gender, teachers, health and the most disadvantaged groups are vital for accelerating the pace of change.

The EFA Development Index: 4 goals, 123 countries

The Education for All Development Index (EDI), introduced in 2003, provides a summary measure of a country's situation vis-à-vis EFA. It covers four goals: UPE, adult literacy, gender and quality of education. The data are insufficiently standardized to allow inclusion of early childhood care and education (goal 1) and life skills (goal 3). Each goal in the EDI has a proxy indicator: total net enrolment ratio for UPE, the literacy rate among persons age 15 and over for adult literacy, the gender-specific EFA index for gender and the percentage of pupils who reach Grade 5 (survival rate) for education quality. The EDI falls between 0 and 1, with 1 representing EFA achievement. The index for 2002 has been computed for the 123 countries for which data are available on all four components. Results show that:

- Forty-six countries (more than one-third of those for which data are available) have an EDI above 0.95 and can thus be considered as having achieved EFA or



In Guizhou province, China, a primary school student listens attentively.

being close to doing so. These countries are mostly located in North America and Europe, where education has been compulsory for decades.

- Forty-nine countries, in all regions, have EDI values between 0.80 and 0.94. Quality remains an issue, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the Arab States, low adult literacy rates pull the EDI down.
- Twenty-eight countries have EDI values below 0.80. More than half are in sub-Saharan Africa. In these countries, all four components of the EDI are at low levels. They are unlikely to achieve EFA by 2015 without dramatically stepped-up efforts, including in international support, though there is very rapid and encouraging change among many of the countries with the lowest indicators. (Table 1.1)

Changes in the EDI between 1998 and 2002 were moderate. On average, countries increased their index rating by 1.2%, and the ranking of countries was stable. Significant progress (by more than 10%) was made in Cambodia, Ethiopia and Mozambique. Low-EDI countries registering sharp decreases (by 5% to 11%) include Chad, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Papua

Table 1.1: Distribution of countries by EDI values and by region, 2002

	Far from EFA: EDI below 0.80	Intermediate position: EDI between 0.80 and 0.94	Close to EFA: EDI between 0.95 and 0.97	EFA achieved: EDI between 0.98 and 1.00
Sub-Saharan Africa	16	7	1	
Arab States	5	10	1	
Central Asia		2	1	2
East Asia and the Pacific	3	7	2	1
South and West Asia	3	1		
Latin America/Caribbean	1	20	4	1
North America/West. Europe		1	9	8
Central and Eastern Europe		1	12	4
Total	28	49	30	16

Source: See Chapter 2 in the full EFA Report.

New Guinea, where the survival rate to Grade 5 deteriorated. In more than three-quarters of the fifty-eight countries for which all four EDI proxies were available for both 1998 and 2002, at least one indicator moved in the opposite direction to the others.

Box 1.1 The toll of conflict and natural disasters

A major obstacle to achieving EFA is the number of countries in, or recently emerged from, conflict, natural disasters (such as the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami) and economic instability. In 2003, there were thirty-six armed conflicts, mostly civil wars, in twenty-nine countries, almost all low-income, and 90% of the victims were civilians. Conflicts and their aftermath shake the foundations of education systems, not only inflicting physical destruction but also causing trauma and fear among parents and children. Large numbers of internally displaced persons and cross-border refugees also result from prolonged armed conflict. A recent study covering 118 refugee camps in 23 asylum countries found high dropout rates during the school year.



A young pupil among the ruins of her school in Galle, Sri Lanka, following the December 2004 tsunami.

Chronic violent conflict in parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Somalia and southern Sudan significantly reduced access to education. Some 95% of Timor-Leste's classrooms were

destroyed in the violence following independence. In Colombia, eighty-three teachers were killed in 2003. Keeping schools running during conflicts and other emergencies offers some stability, normality and hope for the future. In some contexts, communities have organized rudimentary schools after being displaced during conflict. The work of international agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which has included successful efforts in distributing educational materials and developing teacher education, is crucial in this regard.

Early childhood care and education: a low public policy priority

Early childhood care and education (ECCE), the special theme of the 2007 Report, consists of a range of programmes that are all aimed at the physical, cognitive, emotional and social development of children before they enter primary school. Monitoring the *childhood care* component of ECCE is particularly difficult, owing to the scarcity of data. Current figures focus on participation levels in pre-primary education programmes. Many countries still consider ECCE a domain for private initiative rather than public policy. Progress was limited between 1998 and 2002, with a few exceptions, including India, where the gross enrolment ratio (GER) increased from 19.5% to 34%. Pre-primary education is well developed across North America and Europe, as well as in several countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, and East Asia and the Pacific. In sharp contrast are sub-Saharan Africa (median GER below 10%), the Arab States (close to 18%), Central Asia (29%), and South and West Asia (32%). Gender disparities in pre-primary are less pronounced than at other levels of education and tend to favour girls, except in the Arab States.

Across sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, and the Arab States, enrolment ratios are rising rapidly and the gender gap is slowly closing

Quality universal primary education: bolder action required on access, fees and teachers

Progress towards UPE has been slow overall since Dakar: the world's net enrolment ratio increased by only one percentage point, from 83.6% in 1998 to 84.6% in 2002. Across sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, and the Arab States, however, enrolment ratios are rising rapidly and the gender gap is slowly closing. Yet, many countries still combine low enrolment ratios with insufficient capacity to accommodate all children, calling for continued policy efforts to expand systems and to improve their quality.

Access to primary school remains an issue. Intake rates measure access to the first grade of primary education. Gross intake rates (GIRs) above 100% are the rule rather than the exception, meaning that many children younger or older than the official entrance age are enrolled in primary school. The GIR can also reflect obstacles to timely enrolment, such as high costs or lack of schools; 40% of sub-Saharan African countries have GIRs below 95%, implying that mere access to primary schools remains an issue, especially for poor rural children and particularly girls. A positive sign is that some of the countries with the lowest intake rates recorded increases of 30% or more between 1998 and 2002 (Guinea, the Niger, Senegal, the United Republic of Tanzania and Yemen).

Table 1.2: Enrolment in primary education by region, 1998 and 2002

	Total enrolment				Gross enrolment ratios			Net enrolment ratios		
	1998	2002	Difference		1998	2002	Difference	1998	2002	Difference
	(000)	(000)	(000)	%	%	%	(percentage points)	%	%	(percentage points)
World	655 343	671 359	16 015	2	101	104	3.1	83.6	84.6	1.0
Developing countries	569 072	589 291	20 219	4	100	104	3.6	82.0	83.2	1.2
Developed countries	70 399	67 880	-2 519	-4	102	101	-1.5	96.6	95.6	-0.9
Countries in transition	15 872	14 187	-1 685	-11	101	106	5.1	85.4	89.1	3.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	81 319	100 670	19 351	24	80	91	11.2	56.2	63.5	7.3
Arab States	34 725	37 137	2 411	7	90	94	4.1	78.1	82.6	4.5
Central Asia	6 891	6 396	-495	-7	99	102	2.7	88.9	89.9	1.0
East Asia and the Pacific	217 317	207 054	-10 263	-5	112	111	-0.6	95.7	92.1	-3.7
South and West Asia	158 096	175 527	17 431	11	95	102	7.4	78.6	82.5	3.9
Latin America and the Caribbean	78 656	69 498	-9 158	-12	121	119	-2.0	94.4	96.4	2.0
North America and Western Europe	52 856	51 945	-911	-2	103	101	-1.8	96.3	95.3	-1.0
Central and Eastern Europe	25 484	23 133	-2 351	-9	97	99	2.1	87.2	89.0	1.7

Source: See Chapter 2 in the full EFA Report.

Participation in primary school inches up. A total of 671 million children were enrolled in primary school in 2002, up from 655 million in 1998. Enrolment increases were particularly significant in sub-Saharan Africa, and South and West Asia: each enrolled nearly 20 million additional children. But high fertility is exacerbating the challenge of getting all children into school: in sub-Saharan Africa, the school-age population is likely to increase by 34 million (32%) over the next decade. The HIV/AIDS epidemic, other diseases and political conflict are expected to leave one-tenth of these children orphaned by 2010, necessitating special interventions (Boxes 1.1 and 1.2). South and West Asia, and the Arab States are likely to witness a 20% increase in their school populations over the period to 2015. In contrast, major decreases are expected in East Asia and the Pacific (reflecting China's falling birth rate), in Central and Eastern Europe (by 17%), and Central Asia (by 23%).

In assessing progress, it is instructive to look at both gross and net enrolment ratios – GER and NER (Table 1.2). The first is a measure of overall enrolment capacity of school systems in purely quantitative terms. The second captures the extent to which children who are in the official age group for a specific level of schooling (e.g. primary) are enrolled. The NER does not take into account enrolled children who are outside a given official age group because of early or delayed enrolment or grade repetition. There is a sharp discrepancy between the GER and the NER in many countries, indicating that enrolled children do not progress at a regular pace through the grades and implying that resources could be used more efficiently. This discrepancy is pronounced in many sub-Saharan African countries as well as India and Nepal. Several countries are characterized by GERs well below 100% and NERs of 50% or under (e.g. Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mali and the Niger).

About two-thirds of the countries with data available registered rises in NERs between 1998 and 2002. Most countries with NERs below 80% in 1998 made substantial (>20%) progress (seven sub-Saharan African countries plus Morocco and Yemen). In several cases (including Guinea, Lesotho and the United Republic of Tanzania), governments abolished school fees. In others, including the Niger and Benin, they adopted targeted measures to increase girls' participation in rural areas.

The charging of fees remains a major barrier to progress towards UPE. Despite increased recognition of the gains that result from eliminating fees at the primary level, 89 of the 103 countries with information available on this topic still charge fees, some legal and some illegal. Even when direct fees are eliminated, other household costs can remain high, including for registration, uniforms, transport and learning materials. Making school more affordable, by removing these costs and by providing free or cheap transport and school meals, acts as a powerful incentive for parents to send their children – especially their daughters – to school.

Out-of-primary-school children concentrated in two regions. Despite rising enrolments, about 100 million children of primary school age were still not enrolled in primary schools in 2002,¹ of whom 55% were girls, down slightly from 58% in 1998. Sub-Saharan Africa, and South and West Asia accounted for 70% of the

1. The number of out-of-school children is difficult to compute accurately. The figure of 100 million includes all children of primary-school age who are not enrolled in primary schools, i.e. those not in school plus those in school levels other than primary. Data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics indicate that 0.8% of children of primary-school age were enrolled in pre-primary education and 2.3% in secondary schools. Not taking into account those enrolled in secondary school would reduce the global figure to 85.5 million.

Box 1.2 HIV/AIDS: the toll on education systems

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is leaving many children orphaned (having lost either or both parents). Particularly affected are eastern and southern Africa, where 31% to 77% of all orphans are HIV/AIDS orphans, compared to 4% to 39% in the rest of Africa. Unless schools offer special support to these children, they are at great risk of not continuing their education. The pandemic is also accentuating teacher shortages and absenteeism, especially in Africa. In the best-case scenario, Zambia, the United Republic of Tanzania and Kenya, will each have lost 600 teachers to HIV/AIDS in 2005. In Mozambique, HIV/AIDS-related teacher absenteeism is likely to have cost US\$3.3 million in 2005, plus US\$0.3 million for additional teacher training.

Education has a documented impact on the pandemic. A study in thirty-two countries found that literate women were four times more likely than illiterate ones to know the main ways to avoid HIV/AIDS. In Zambia, HIV infection rates fell by almost half among educated women but showed little decline for those with no formal schooling. Schools can play an active role in mitigating the spread of the disease by providing reliable information and counselling, and taking measures to prolong girls' education.



A field worker from Botswana's Total Community Mobilisation initiative on a home visit to a grandmother who is caring for HIV/AIDS orphans.

global total. Nineteen countries are each home to more than 1 million out-of-primary-school children. Ten are in sub-Saharan Africa, where countries with relatively small populations, such as Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, face huge challenges.

Not all children reach the last grade of primary school. Several indicators provide information on the quality of schooling and student achievement.² Although promotion policies vary, grade repetition is one such indicator: on average, less than 3% of students repeated a primary school grade in 2002. However, the figure is above 15% in more than half the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in Brazil, Guatemala, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mauritania, Morocco and Nepal. Initiatives to reduce repetition are under way in several countries (e.g. Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger).

Ensuring that children remain in school until the last grade of primary schooling is another major challenge. In about one-third of countries with data, less than two-thirds of the pupils enrolled in primary school reach the last grade. The problem is particularly acute in sub-Saharan Africa, but also severe in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Nepal and a few countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Furthermore, in most countries with data, not all children who reach the last grade of primary school complete it. Low levels of primary completion may in some countries reflect strong selection policies being applied because of the limited number of places

available in lower secondary education. Improving the quality of education and expanding access to secondary education are thus conditions for UPE to be fully achieved.

The need for more and better trained teachers.

Addressing teacher shortage and training issues is a top priority for countries that still need to significantly increase the coverage of their primary school systems. Although the number of pupils per teacher declined between 1998 and 2002 in more than two-thirds of the 143 countries with data, there are exceptions. In sub-Saharan Africa, pupil/teacher ratios (PTRs) typically exceed 40:1 and are as high as 70:1 in some countries (e.g. Chad, the Congo and Mozambique). PTRs have also increased in several countries that have eliminated or reduced school fees (e.g. the United Republic of Tanzania).

Projections were made of the number of teachers needed to increase GERs to 100% by 2015 with a target PTR of 40:1 to assure quality. In some West African countries (e.g. Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger), teacher numbers would have to grow dramatically, by 20% per year. The increases in absolute numbers would have to be substantial: 20,000 extra teachers in Cameroon and 167,000 in Bangladesh. Such figures have obvious consequences for salary budgets and for training. New data confirm that large proportions of primary-school teachers lack adequate qualifications: in only one-quarter of the approximately 100 developing countries with data available in 2002 have all or almost all primary teachers received some pedagogical training. In some cases (e.g. the Niger), the proportion

2. For an extensive discussion of education quality, see the 2005 Report.

of qualified teachers is dropping as a result of the hiring of volunteer teachers to cope with increased demand for primary education. Several countries are lowering the number of school years required to become a teacher and introducing accelerated pre-service training programmes: in Mozambique, such measures raised the proportion of trained teachers from 33% to 60%. Rwanda increased the proportion of trained teachers from 49% to 80% without lowering entrance standards. In regions characterized by low enrolment (South and West Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa), men continue to outnumber women teachers at primary and secondary levels. In these regions, efforts to draw women to the profession can strongly influence girls' learning achievement³.

Secondary and tertiary education: rapid enrolment increases

The global number of secondary school students rose from 430 million in 1998 to almost 500 million in 2002 – more than four times the increase in the number of primary-school students. The global secondary GER jumped from 60% to 65%. OECD countries have almost reached universal secondary education. High secondary GERs are also found in Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Levels of participation are lower in the Arab States (where the regional average is 65%), East Asia and the Pacific (71%), South and West Asia (50%), and sub-Saharan Africa (28%). Nevertheless, the enrolment ratios for secondary school in sub-Saharan Africa grew by more than 15% in more than half the countries, and they doubled in Uganda.

The number of students in tertiary education continued to increase rapidly, from an estimated 90 million in 1998 to 121 million in 2002. Growth rates in developing countries are, on average, more than twice those observed in developed countries.

Learning achievement remains an overriding concern. Newly published data on learning outcomes suggest that average achievement levels have decreased in recent years in sub-Saharan African countries. The 2003 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) found that most students surveyed in Botswana, Chile, Ghana, Morocco, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia and South Africa did not reach the lowest benchmark in mathematics.

The 2003 results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reveals that more than 40% of 15-year-old students in middle-income countries (e.g. Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico and Tunisia) scored at or below level 1 of the mathematics, science and reading scales. In eight of the twenty-six

high-income countries and territories participating in the study, 20% or more of the 15 year-old students performed at level 1 or below on the reading scale. In mathematics, the category of low achievers accounted for one-quarter to more than one-third in Greece, Italy, Portugal and the United States. Research also shows that girls perform better than boys in countries where they have equal access to the school system, whatever the country's income level.

Low-cost school health interventions exist that can reduce dropout rates and increase school achievement

School health and nutrition interventions improve learning. The 2005 Report analysed key factors with a positive impact on student achievement, from qualified teachers, relevant curriculum and appropriate learning materials to enough learning time and pedagogical strategies that encourage interaction. A safe and welcoming learning environment is equally critical. The evidence is also very strong that good health and nutrition are prerequisites for effective learning. Iron deficiency, caused by malaria and hookworms, occurs among 50% of all children in developing countries, and helminth infections among 25% to 35% of all children. Low-cost interventions can make a major dent in these educational and human losses, improving IQ by four to six points and school attendance by 10%, as well as overall school achievement. The mass delivery of services like deworming and supplements such as vitamin A, iodine and iron can reduce dropout rates, result in an additional 2.5 student-years of primary schooling and thus have a major impact on learning.

The slowly closing gender gap

Both the EFA agenda and the Millennium Development Goals call for the achievement of parity in enrolments for girls and boys at primary and secondary levels by 2005, and of gender equality at all levels of education by 2015. A total of 104 out of 180 countries with data available in 2002 had reached gender parity in enrolment at the primary level. Major gender disparities that impede girls are concentrated in the Arab States, South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Very rapid progress has been achieved in several poor countries with low enrolment ratios, notably Afghanistan, Benin, Chad, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Guinea, India, Morocco, Nepal and Yemen. Nonetheless, even before 2005 data are available, it is clear that the 2005 goal has been missed in over seventy countries.

At the **primary level**, gender disparities stem first and foremost from unequal access to school. Parity at this level has not been achieved in 40% of the

3. For in-depth discussion of gender and education issues, see the 2003/4 Report.

159 countries with available data. In the majority of cases, girls are the ones facing discrimination. Important change is occurring, however, with several sub-Saharan African countries recording dramatic progress between 1998 and 2002. South and West Asia presents a diverse picture: Pakistan has one of the largest gaps in access to school, with a gender parity index⁴ of 0.73, while in India and Nepal, nearly as many girls as boys enrol in the first year.

At the primary level, gender disparities stem first and foremost from unequal access to school. In the majority of cases, girls are the ones facing discrimination

At the **secondary level**, only 57 of 172 countries reached gender parity in 2002. Disparities at this level can favour girls or boys. In 56 of the 115 remaining countries, more girls than boys are enrolled. When access is not limited by resource constraints, more girls than boys participate, especially at upper-secondary level, and they perform better. Disparities favouring boys are wide and found almost exclusively in low-income countries. Those favouring girls are narrow and observed in a large number of countries with very different levels of per capita GNP, from Lesotho to Denmark. Among the seventy-nine countries that are unlikely to achieve gender parity in secondary education by 2015, forty-two have lower male than female enrolment ratios. This point requires policy attention; it explains why several developed countries (including Denmark, Finland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom) are at risk of not achieving gender parity at secondary level by 2015. The problem of lower male than female ratios is also increasingly common in middle-income developing countries, especially those of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Gender parity is exceptional in **tertiary** education, found in only 4 of the 142 countries with data available for 2002. Expansion at this level since 1998 has particularly benefited women, and disparities favouring the latter are even more frequent than in secondary education. Gender disparities favouring men are found in most countries of sub-Saharan Africa, and South and West Asia, in some Arab States and in a few Central Asian countries.

Integrated strategies focusing at once on actions inside schools, within the community and at broader societal level have an impact in countries where girls have very limited access to school or drop out

prematurely. The 2003/4 Report made a detailed case for gender parity and documented proven ways of increasing it. Women teachers, fee-free schooling, schools closer to home with basic sanitation and separate toilets, protection against sexual violence and community support for girls' education are essential elements of a strategy towards greater gender equality. Ensuring that teachers, curricula and learning materials do not reinforce stereotypes but create positive role models for girls can deeply influence achievement. Targeted scholarships for secondary education encourage girls to continue their schooling. The Niger's strategy to eliminate gender bias in schooling integrates eight dimensions, ranging from local actions in rural areas promoting girls' enrolment to gender-based training for teachers and prizes for the girls who achieve the best grades in science subjects.

More broadly, public policies must go far beyond initiatives that focus on enrolment ratios alone, and also promote equal opportunities in society and the labour market. This aim recognizes that gender equality – not simply the numerical concept of parity – is the goal towards which countries should be striving.

Prospects for achieving UPE and gender parity

Progress towards UPE is proxied by the total primary NER. Among the 163 countries for which data were available in 2002, 47 had achieved UPE. Projections could be run for about 90 of the remaining 116 countries, on the basis of trends observed between 1990 and 2002⁵ (Table 1.3). These showed that:

- Only twenty additional countries are likely to achieve UPE by 2015 beyond the forty-seven that had already done so by 2002.
- Forty-four countries, most of them starting from low levels of enrolment, may not achieve UPE, though they are making good progress. For example, Burkina Faso's NER increased rapidly from 26% to 36% between 1990 and 2002, but is still very low. Bangladesh's NER rose from 78% in 1990 to 88% in 1998 but then stagnated.
- Twenty countries are at risk of not achieving the goal because of decreases in their NERs. Most are countries in transition in Central and Eastern Europe, and Central Asia whose school systems have yet to recover from the break-up of the Soviet Union.
- Three countries are at serious risk of not achieving UPE by 2015: Azerbaijan, Papua New Guinea and Saudi Arabia have NERs that are below 80% and decreasing.

Country prospects for achieving gender parity are assessed on the basis of trends from 1990 to 2002 in GER by sex in primary and secondary education. These projections are made for both 2005 and 2015 for 149 countries. (Table 1.4)

4. The ratio of female-to-male value of a given indicator. A GPI between 0.97 and 1.03 indicates parity between the sexes.

5. Countries that have achieved UPE are not included in this prospective analysis.

Table 1.3: Prospects for reaching UPE by 2015

Distance from 100% NER in 2002	Close or in an intermediate position	QUADRANT I At risk of not achieving the goal 20 countries Albania, Bahrain, British Virgin Islands, Czech Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Estonia, Georgia, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Malaysia, Netherlands Antilles, Palestinian A.T., Paraguay, Romania, Slovenia, South Africa, TFYR Macedonia, Uruguay, Viet Nam	QUADRANT II High chance of achieving the goal 20 countries Algeria, Belarus, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Colombia, Cuba, Guatemala, Indonesia, Ireland, Jamaica, Jordan, Lesotho, Lithuania, Malta, Mauritius, Morocco, Nicaragua, Vanuatu, Venezuela
	Intermediate position or far	QUADRANT IV Serious risk of not achieving the goal 3 countries Azerbaijan, Papua New Guinea, Saudi Arabia	QUADRANT III Low chance of achieving the goal 44 countries Bangladesh, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Chile, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Djibouti, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Iran (Isl. Rep.), Kenya, Lao PDR, Latvia, Lebanon, Macao (China), Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Niger, Oman, Republic of Moldova, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Senegal, Swaziland, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, United Arab Emirates, U.R. of Tanzania, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe
		Away from the goal	Towards the goal
Change over the period from 1990 to 2002			

Table 1.4: Country prospects for the achievement of gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and 2015

		Gender parity in secondary education				Number of countries
		Achieved in 2002	Likely to be achieved in 2005	Likely to be achieved in 2015	At risk of not achieving the goal by 2015	
Gender parity in primary education	Achieved in 2002	Albania, Anguilla, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Barbados, Belarus, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ecuador, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Mauritius, Netherlands, Norway, Oman, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Seychelles, Slovakia, Slovenia, TFYR Macedonia, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United States, Uzbekistan 49	Austria, Bolivia, Guyana, Kenya 4	Switzerland, Argentina, Belize, Botswana 4	Gambia, Mauritania, Myanmar, Peru, Poland, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Kuwait, Lesotho, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Mexico, Mongolia, Namibia, Netherlands Antilles, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Palestinian Autonomous Territories, Philippines, Qatar, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Spain, Suriname, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom, Vanuatu, Venezuela 43	100
	Likely to be achieved in 2005	Estonia 1	Islamic Republic of Iran 1	Ghana, Saudi Arabia 2	India, Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon, Panama, Tunisia 5	9
	Likely to be achieved in 2015	Cuba 1	Egypt 1		Nepal, Senegal, Tajikistan, Togo, Zambia, Brazil, Portugal 7	9
	At risk of not achieving the goal by 2015	El Salvador, Swaziland, Paraguay 3		Cameroon, Macao (China), South Africa, Viet Nam 4	Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Lao PDR, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Papua New Guinea, Sudan, Turkey, Yemen, Algeria, Aruba, British Virgin Islands 24	31
Number of countries		54	6	10	79	149

Note: Where countries are shown in blue, enrolment disparities at the expense of boys are observed in secondary education.



A 9-year-old doing her homework while selling fruit on the pavements of Calcutta, India.

Three main categories emerge:

- Forty-nine countries have achieved gender parity in both primary and secondary enrolment. All EFA regions are represented, and large Asian countries such as China and Indonesia belong to this category. Six more countries are likely to achieve both goals by 2005 and eight others by 2015.
- Forty-three countries have achieved gender parity in primary education (and twelve more are likely to achieve it by 2005 or 2015) but will probably not achieve it in secondary education by the target date. In most of these countries, gender disparities favour girls. However, there are also countries, such as India, where female enrolment is rapidly increasing at the primary level, but female transition rates to secondary schooling remain low.
- Twenty-four countries are unlikely to achieve parity at either level by 2015. In those countries, disparities favour boys and the school systems are underdeveloped at both the primary and secondary levels.⁶

Thus, among the 100 countries that had not achieved gender parity in either primary or secondary education or at both levels by 2002, only 6 are likely to have reached it at both by 2005 and 8 more by 2015, while

86 countries are at risk of not achieving gender parity by 2015, ten years after the 2005 target (7 in primary education, 55 in secondary education and 24 in both).

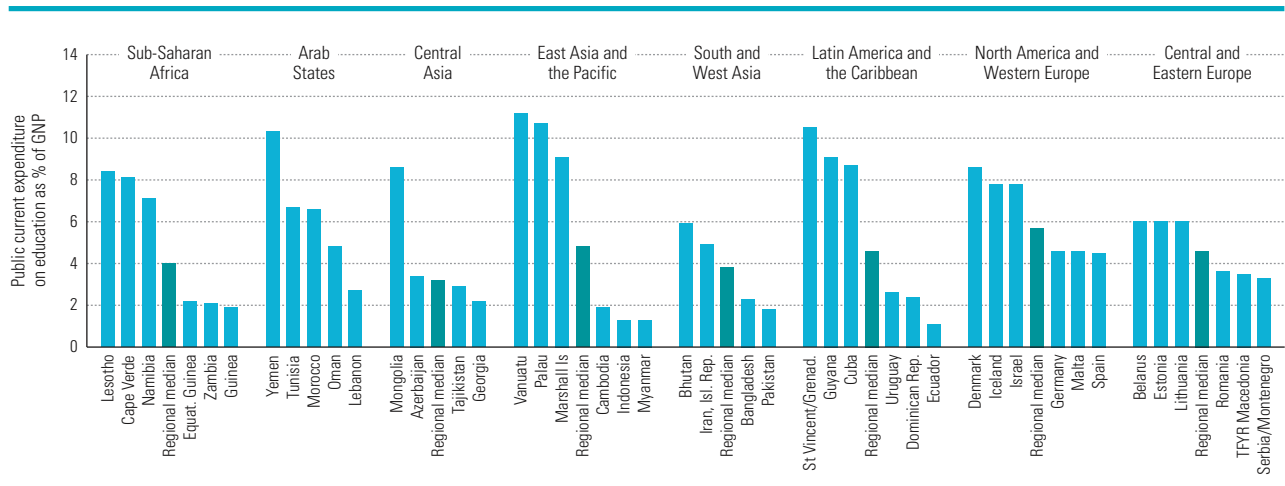
National planning and financing to reach EFA

Accelerating the pace of change to meet the EFA goals in ten years' time requires urgent and sustained attention to planning, strategies to address access and quality, and adequate domestic resource allocation. The extent to which countries are tackling the EFA goals is reflected in planning and public financing. A recent study of national education plans from thirty-two countries showed that those in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa clearly place top priority on achieving UPE. Where enrolment rates are relatively high, reaching severely disadvantaged target groups receives stronger emphasis. All thirty-two have strategies to improve quality (better teacher training, for example) but only eighteen detail measures to enhance access for girls and women. Twenty-five give attention to literacy. Only seven have plans that include all six EFA goals; a further eight give explicit attention to at least five of the six goals.

The study also suggests that overall financing levels may not match countries' ambitious national education goals. For the thirty countries with data available, ten

6. There are also seven countries that have achieved gender parity at the secondary level, or might achieve it by 2015, without being likely to achieve it at the primary level.

Figure 1.1: Public current expenditure on education as a percentage of GNP, 2002



Source: See Chapter 3 in the full EFA Report.

spent below 3% of GDP on education, fourteen between 3% and 5% and six between 5% and 9%. A comparison of country papers prepared for the 2001 and 2004 sessions of the International Conference on Education showed nearly all countries paying consistent attention to UPE and education quality, and a noticeable increase in attention to gender and to issues of inclusion and HIV/AIDS.

Although the appropriate level of spending depends on many factors, there is clearly a minimum level below which government expenditure cannot sink without serious consequences for quality. Public education spending relative to national income shows that regional medians are highest in North America and Western Europe, and in East Asia and the Pacific. In nine countries, including Indonesia and Pakistan, the share is less than 2% of GNP. It exceeds 6% in about one-quarter of the countries with data. Public spending on education as a share of national income increased between 1998 and 2002 in about two-thirds of the countries with data, in some cases almost doubling (e.g. Cameroon, Malaysia and Madagascar). Education's share of the national budget, which is an indication of its ranking among other national expenditure categories, typically ranges between 10% and 30%. More than half the countries in sub-Saharan Africa with data available spend over 15% of the government budget on education. Countries where education accounts for a quarter or more of total government expenditure include Botswana, Guinea, Mexico, Morocco, Thailand and Yemen. (Figure 1.1)

Higher levels of national expenditure do not in themselves assure good practice and good quality. Efficiency in terms of how resources are used in the education system requires greater attention. Central education ministry resources do not always reach schools: studies show that only 16% of non-wage resources arrived at designated schools in Senegal,

Public spending on education as a share of national income increased between 1998 and 2002 in about two-thirds of countries with data

and in Zambia only 40%. Holding education stakeholders accountable for their performance can help reduce leakage. Uganda, for example, launched a public expenditure tracking survey in 1996, widely publishing and broadcasting the amount of funds transferred to schools every month. An evaluation of the campaign showed great improvement between 1995 and 2001 in the per capita amount of grant money reaching schools. Equity is another important dimension to be considered in any analysis of public spending: too often, public spending is unequally distributed across income groups or geographically. In Mozambique, for example, the capital city is home to 6% of the population but receives almost one third of all public education spending. Strategies that are inclusive of all children and adults, whatever their circumstances, are crucial in speeding up progress towards EFA.

Part II.

Why literacy matters

- *Literacy is a right and a key to other rights*
- *There are many understandings and definitions of literacy, couched in terms of skills (e.g. reading, writing and calculating), practices (the uses of literacy) and transformation (personal, social and political)*
- *Literacy is best viewed as a continuum of skills rather than a simple dichotomy between 'literate' and 'illiterate'*
- *Literacy is not only about individuals, but also about literate communities and societies*
- *Literacy matters for a wide range of individual purposes and development goals*
- *Legal frameworks must acknowledge the right to literacy*
- *Investing in adult literacy programmes as well as in schools makes economic sense*

Goal 4 of the Dakar Framework for Action calls upon countries to achieve 'a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults'. Although goal 3 makes no explicit reference to literacy, the pledge to meet the learning needs of all young people and adults 'through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes' also implies the need for basic literacy. This part outlines how understandings of literacy have evolved, establishes that literacy is a right and a key to other rights, and provides evidence of the multiple personal, social and economic benefits that the acquisition of literacy confers. Literacy alone, however, guarantees neither other rights nor any of its benefits. These depend on the implementation of relevant laws and policies in specific countries.

Evolving definitions reflect broadening dimensions of literacy

Literacy has been interpreted and defined in many ways. These have evolved over time, influenced by academic research, international policy agendas and national priorities. A fundamental thread runs through these understandings: literacy embodies reading and writing skills. Numeracy is generally understood as a complement to or component of literacy.

Acknowledging the limitations of an exclusively skills-based view of literacy, researchers attempted in the latter half of the twentieth century to focus on the uses and applications of skills in 'meaningful' ways. In the 1960s and 1970s, the notion of 'functional literacy' gained ground and emphasized links between literacy, productivity and overall socio-economic development.

Recent perspectives have also involved the ways in which literacy is used and practised in different social and cultural contexts. Many educators have come to view literacy as an active process of learning involving social awareness and critical reflection, which can empower individuals and groups to promote social change. The work of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire integrated notions of active learning within particular socio-cultural settings. As he wrote: 'Every reading of the word is preceded by a reading of the world.'

The term literacy has been broadened to become a metaphor for many kinds of skills. Some scholars suggest that the concept of 'multiple literacies' – related to technological, health, information, media, visual, scientific and other contexts – is better suited to life in the twenty-first century. Emphasis is placed not only on reading and writing, but also on skills and practices that are relevant to the changing dynamics of community life.

Since the 1950s, international organizations – UNESCO in particular – have played an influential role in developing policies on literacy, drawing on emerging



Technology draws an enthusiastic crowd in an impoverished neighbourhood of Dakar, Senegal.

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conceptual understandings. Following the Second World War, UNESCO supported the spread of adult literacy as part of a concerted effort to advance basic education. The first global survey of adult literacy, covering over sixty countries, was published in 1957, at a time when policy-makers were beginning to consider how education and literacy could better enable individuals to participate in and benefit from a modernizing economy. This and other publications contributed to a standard definition of literacy, which was adopted by UNESCO's General Conference in 1958:

‘A person is literate who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his [or her] everyday life.’ This definition became a guidepost for measuring literacy in national censuses.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the international policy community stressed the role of literacy in economic growth and national development, especially in newly independent countries. Reflecting this emerging understanding, UNESCO's General Conference in 1978 adopted a definition of functional literacy still in use today: ‘A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for

effective functioning of his [or her] group and community and also for enabling him [or her] to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his [or her] own and the community's development.’ Meanwhile, Freire's theory of ‘conscientization’, which viewed literacy as embodying social awareness and critical reflection, and as an integral factor in social change, gained popularity in developing countries and influenced political declarations.

Over the 1980s and 1990s, definitions of literacy broadened to accommodate the challenges of globalization, including the impact of new technology and information media and the emergence of knowledge economies. In countries with high literacy rates, assessing the range of adult literacy skills in evolving labour markets and knowledge-based societies has come to the fore. Greater attention is also paid to the language or languages in which literacy is learned and practised.

Reflecting these concerns, the World Declaration on Education for All, adopted in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 placed the challenge of literacy within the broader context of meeting the basic learning needs of every child, youth and adult, stating: ‘These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development,

to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning.'

The Dakar Framework for Action and the 2002 General Assembly resolution on the United Nations Literacy Decade, 2003-2012, acknowledged that literacy is at the heart of lifelong learning. As the resolution put it: 'Literacy is crucial to the acquisition, by every child, youth and adult, of essential life skills that enable them to address the challenges they can face in life, and represents an essential step in basic education, which is an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century'. The international community further underscored in the resolution the social dimension of literacy, recognizing that 'literacy is at the heart of basic education for all and creating literate environments and societies is essential for achieving the goals of eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy'.

The right to literacy

The right to literacy is implicit in the right to education recognized by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Other conventions and international declarations have since restated this right. The 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education specifically tackles the issue of those who have not attended or completed primary school. The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child recognize literacy, rather than just education, as a right. Both contain explicit references to the promotion of literacy. Key international declarations also stand as political milestones. The 1975 Persepolis Declaration describes literacy as a 'fundamental human right', a statement reiterated in the Hamburg Declaration of 1997.

Several instruments focus on the language of literacy acquisition. The 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights outlines the right of persons belonging to minorities to use their own language. The 1989 ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples states that, wherever practicable, children are to be taught to read and write in their indigenous language

© REUTERS



In Dhaka, Bangladesh, a mother helps her daughter with reading.

and that adequate measures should also be taken to ensure that they have the opportunity to attain fluency in an official language.

Many documents allow for an expanded interpretation of literacy, beyond reading and writing skills to, for instance, access to scientific and technical knowledge, legal information, culture and the media.

Finally, and importantly, literacy has been recognized as a mechanism for the pursuit of other human rights. The Vienna Declaration of 1993 calls on states to eradicate illiteracy, linking such efforts to greater respect of and protection for human rights and personal liberties.

The benefits of literacy: human, social, cultural, political, economic

Literacy confers a wide set of benefits on individuals, families, communities and nations. Providing an evidence-based account of these is not straightforward. Most research does not separate the benefits of literacy per se from those of merely attending school or participating in adult literacy programmes. There have been few rigorous assessments of the latter in terms of cognitive achievement and lasting effects. Benefits such as political awareness, empowerment and critical reflection, moreover, are intrinsically difficult to measure.

The human benefits of literacy are deeply tied to an individual's self-esteem, confidence and personal empowerment

With these caveats in mind, a spectrum of benefits associated with literacy can be identified. The first are **human benefits**, deeply tied to an individual's self-esteem, confidence and personal empowerment. Such benefits bring a sense of greater space for individual and collective action. Learners in Namibia, for example, speak of self-reliance and the wish not to be cheated as reasons for interest in following literacy classes. Related to this is the increased civic engagement – whether in unions, community activities or politics as such – found to be correlated with participation in adult literacy programmes. In El Salvador, newly literate

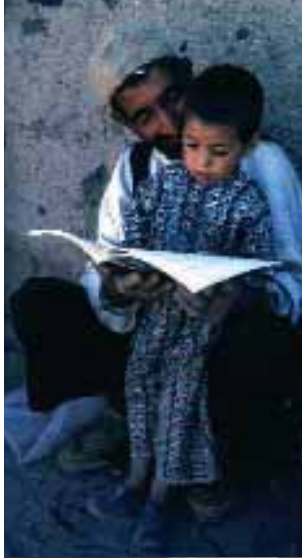
women in rural areas more readily claimed a voice in community meetings. In Nepal, women who were enrolled in state-run literacy programmes expressed greater knowledge of local politics and more interest in running for office. Literacy programmes can also have an impact on peace and reconciliation in post-conflict contexts. In Colombia, an NGO literacy project encouraged some 900 adults who migrated to Medellín from rural areas affected by armed conflict to create texts based on their experiences, helping them come to terms with trauma.

Women who participate in literacy programmes have better knowledge of health and family planning, and are more likely to adopt preventive health measures

Cultural benefits are more difficult to identify clearly. Literacy programmes can challenge attitudes by developing critical reflection skills, a hallmark of the Freirean approach. Women's access to reading and writing can result in new attitudes and norms. In Pakistan, for instance, studies in two rural communities found that younger women were creating private time to read and write, and, in the process, questioning certain values and roles. Cultural diversity is enhanced by literacy programmes in minority languages, improving people's ability to engage with their own culture, as has been observed in programmes from Malaysia to New Zealand in which learners develop stories based on indigenous folk tales.

Improving literacy carries potentially large **social benefits**. Research in several countries, including Bolivia, Nepal and Nicaragua, shows that women who participate in literacy programmes have better knowledge of health and family planning, and are more likely to adopt preventive health measures such as immunization or to seek medical help for themselves and their children. The correlation between education and lower fertility is well established, though little research has been done on the impact of adult literacy programmes on reproductive behaviour. Educated parents – whether through formal schooling or adult programmes – are more likely to send their children to school and to help them with their work.

Most literacy programmes have targeted women rather than both sexes, limiting the ways in which gender equality issues can be directly addressed. Participation in adult literacy programmes enables women to gain access to and challenge male



© UNESCO / Dominique Roeder



domains, for example by learning official languages or managing household finances. Through literacy programmes, participants also tend to gain a stronger voice in the household because of their experience speaking before the class. Although social barriers may prevent women from enjoying real equality, there are many instances of literacy programmes taking on gender issues at the community level, such as campaigns in India against men's alcohol consumption and the use of legal measures to address abuse.

The **economic returns** to education have been extensively studied, especially in terms of increased individual income and economic growth. While the number of years of schooling remains the most frequently used variable, recent studies also look at assessments of cognitive skills, typically literacy and numeracy test scores. They find that literacy levels have a positive impact on earnings beyond that of years spent in school. Studies on the economic impact of adult literacy programmes are much rarer.

Several studies have attempted to disentangle the impact of literacy on growth from that of education. Using data from the International Adult Literacy Survey, one study concluded that differences in average skill levels among OECD countries explained 55% of the differences in economic growth over 1960-94, implying that investment in raising the average skill levels could yield large economic returns. A study on forty-four African countries found that literacy was among the variables with a positive effect on GDP per capita growth, while a survey of thirty-two predominantly Islamic developing countries concluded that levels of adult literacy and school enrolment both had a positive impact on growth. Another study suggests that a literacy rate of at least 40% is a prerequisite for sustained rapid economic growth.

How do the returns to investment in adult basic education compare with those to investment in formal schooling? The fact that literacy has been one of the more neglected EFA goals partly stems from an assumption that primary-level education is more cost-effective than youth and adult programmes. Yet, what sparse evidence exists indicates that the returns on investment in adult literacy programmes are generally comparable to, and compare favourably with, investments in primary level education. For example, a review of literacy projects in Bangladesh, Ghana and Senegal estimated that the costs per successful adult learner were between 13% and 33% of the cost of four years of primary education. ■

- *Some 18% of the world's adults live without literacy skills*
- *The largest numbers of illiterates are concentrated in South and West Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and East Asia and the Pacific*
- *The lowest literacy rates are found in sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia and the Arab States*
- *Africa and South Asia are off-track to meet the 2015 literacy goal*

Part III. Literacy from past to present

- *Only 88 adult women are literate for every 100 literate men*
- *Marked progress towards mass literacy has been made among 15- to 24-year-olds*
- *Indigenous people and people with disabilities remain on the sidelines*
- *Rethinking literacy statistics: conventional measures underestimate the scale of the literacy challenge*
- *How societies made the transition to widespread literacy: the pivotal role of schooling and the impact of literacy campaigns*

Significantly reducing all forms of illiteracy and enabling young and old alike to enrich their literacy skills and practices are the core challenges raised by the EFA literacy goal. To address these, policy-makers need state-of-the-art knowledge of where literacy has been more or less achieved, how it has been (and could be better) measured and monitored, and why certain groups have successfully acquired strong literacy skills while others have not.

How literacy is conventionally measured

Adult literacy figures are to be treated with caution. Until recently, literacy assessments used in cross-national comparisons have been based on official national census figures. In practice, experts determined an individual's literacy level by one of three methods: 1) self-declaration, in which respondents reported their literacy level on a census questionnaire; 2) third-party assessment, involving one individual – typically the

head of household – reporting on the literacy level of household members; and 3) educational attainment, in which number of years of school completed was used as a proxy to distinguish the 'literate' from the 'non-literate'. Each method has serious limitations and tends to use the dichotomous approach, defining individuals as either 'literate' or 'illiterate'.

Since the 1980s, concerns about literacy statistics have gained momentum. How credible and comparable are these data? Measurements not based on direct tests tend to depict individuals' literacy level inaccurately and hence result in inaccurate aggregate literacy rates. Estimates based on years of schooling grow increasingly problematic as evidence accumulates about education quality.

More fundamentally, not all countries use the same definition to classify a person as literate, nor even the same definition of the adult population. Nevertheless, definitions compiled by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics from 105 countries show that a large majority conceives of literacy as the ability to read and/or write simple statements in either a national or indigenous language.



A Jordanian woman registers to vote with the imprint of her thumb at a polling station in 2003.

Just as definitions vary, so does timeliness: censuses every ten years are the norm in developed countries, but not in many developing ones. Census-based literacy statistics can thus be as much as two decades out of date. Moreover, in many contexts, the language in which literacy skills are measured touches upon sensitive, often controversial issues.

Mapping the literacy challenge

According to conventionally obtained data reported by countries for the most recent year in the reference period 2000–2004, the world counts 771 million illiterate adults, some 18% of the adult population. Since 1990, the number of illiterates has fallen by 100 million, mainly due to a marked reduction (by 94 million) in China. (Table 3.1)

Table 3.1: Estimates of adult illiterates and literacy rates by region, 1990 and 2000–2004

	Number of illiterates (000)		Literacy rates (%)		Change from 1990 to 2000–2004 in:		
	1990	2000-2004	1990	2000-2004	Number of illiterates (000)	(%)	Literacy rates (percentage points)
World	871 750	771 129	75.4	81.9	-100 621	-12	6.4
Developing countries	855 127	759 199	67.0	76.4	-95 928	-11	9.4
Developed countries	14 864	10 498	98.0	98.7	-4 365	-29	0.7
Countries in transition	1 759	1 431	99.2	99.4	-328	-19	0.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	128 980	140 544	49.9	59.7	11 564	9	9.8
Arab States	63 023	65 128	50.0	62.7	2 105	3	12.6
Central Asia	572	404	98.7	99.2	-168	-29	0.5
East Asia and the Pacific	232 255	129 922	81.8	91.4	-102 333	-44	9.6
South and West Asia	382 353	381 116	47.5	58.6	-1 237	-0.3	11.2
Latin America and the Caribbean	41 742	37 901	85.0	89.7	-3 841	-9	4.7
Central and Eastern Europe	11 500	8 374	96.2	97.4	-3 126	-27	1.2
North America and Western Europe	11 326	7 740	97.9	98.7	-3 585	-32	0.8

Note: Figures may not add up to world totals because of rounding.

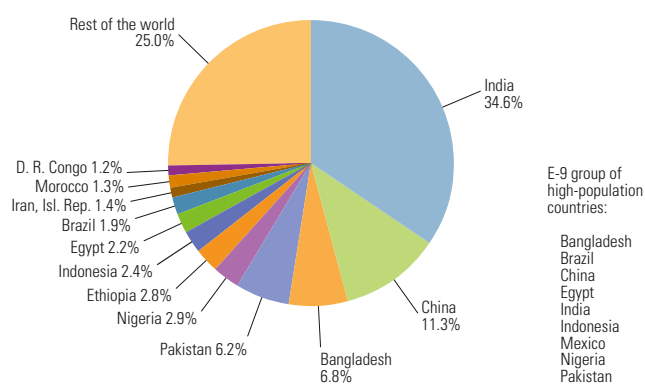
Source: See Chapter 2 in the full EFA Report.

The vast majority of the 771 million adults who lack minimal literacy skills live in three regions: South and West Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, and sub-Saharan Africa. Although East Asia and the Pacific has the highest literacy rate among the developing regions, at 91%, its large population means it is still home to 17% of the world's illiterates. The share of the world's illiterate population living in sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia and the Arab States has increased since 1970, partly owing to relatively high population growth rates; these regions' literacy rates cluster around 60%.

Three-quarters of the world's illiterates live in just twelve countries, of which eight belong to the E-9 group of nine high-population countries. Achieving the Dakar goal hinges on progress in these countries. (Figure 3.1)

In Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Morocco and Pakistan, the absolute numbers of illiterates increased between 1990 and 2000-2004 despite improvements in adult literacy rates, indicating that progress was insufficient to offset the effect of continuing population growth.

Figure 3.1: Distribution of global adult illiterate population, 2000–2004



Source: See Chapter 7 in the full EFA Report.

The world's adult literacy rate – the number of literate persons expressed as a percentage of the total adult population – increased from 56% in 1950 to 70% in 1980, 75% in 1990 and 82% in 2000-2004. On recent trends, the adult literacy rate should reach about 86% by 2015.

On average, the world literacy rate increased at a faster pace in the 1970s than in subsequent decades. While adult literacy rates have improved in all regions, they remain relatively low in South and West Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States. There are also considerable differences between countries within regions. South and West Asia has the lowest literacy rate of any region (59%), mainly due to the levels in Bangladesh (41%) and Pakistan (49%). Among individual countries, Burkina Faso, the Niger and Mali have the world's lowest adult literacy rates (below 20%). (Table 3.2)

In sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, and the Arab States, literacy rates increased by more than 10% between 1990 and 2000. Several countries with literacy rates between 50% and 65%, including Algeria, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria and Oman, have made considerable progress but will still find it difficult to reach the EFA literacy goal by 2015.

Women continue to constitute a majority of the world's illiterates: 64%, unchanged from 1990. At the global level, only 88 adult women are considered literate for every 100 adult men. Regions with relatively low gender parity indices are South and West Asia (0.66), the Arab States (0.69) and sub-Saharan Africa (0.76). In East Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, the GPI is above the global average of 0.88. All other regions have achieved gender parity in adult literacy. (Figure 3.2)

Progress towards mass literacy is especially marked in the 15-24 age group, where expanded access to formal schooling helped raise the global

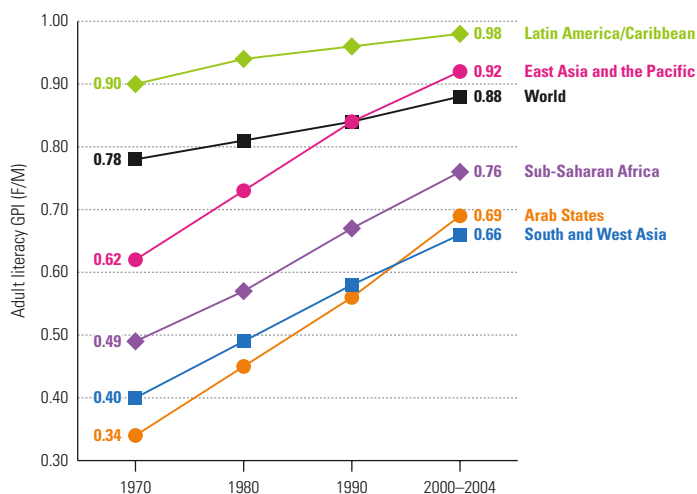
Table 3.2: The literacy challenge compounded: many illiterates, low adult literacy rates, 2000–2004*

	Adult literacy rate is < 63%	Adult literacy rate is > 63%
Number of illiterates is greater than 5 million	Bangladesh; Egypt; Ethiopia; Ghana; India; Morocco; Mozambique; Nepal; Pakistan; Sudan; Yemen	Afghanistan; Algeria; Brazil; China; D.R. Congo; Indonesia; Iraq; Iran, Isl. Rep.; Mexico; Nigeria; Turkey; U.R. Tanzania
Number of illiterates is between 1 and 5 million	Benin; Burkina Faso; Burundi; Central African Republic; Chad; Côte d'Ivoire; Haiti; Mali; Niger; Papua New Guinea; Senegal; Sierra Leone; Togo	Angola; Cambodia; Cameroon; Guatemala; Kenya; Madagascar; Malawi; Malaysia; Myanmar; Peru; Rwanda; Saudi Arabia; South Africa; Syrian Arab Republic; Tunisia; Uganda; Zambia
Number of illiterates is less than 1 million	Comoros; Liberia; Mauritania	Bahrain; Belize; Bolivia; Botswana; Cape Verde; Congo; Dominican Republic; El Salvador; Equatorial Guinea; Honduras; Jamaica; Jordan; Kuwait; Lao PDR; Lesotho; Libyan A.J.; Malta; Mauritius; Namibia; Nicaragua; Oman; Qatar; Suriname; Swaziland; U.A. Emirates; Vanuatu

*The figure of 63% to distinguish between high and low adult literacy rates is based on an examination of the distribution of all countries with rates below 95% and a calculation of the weighted mean.

Source: See Chapter 7 in the full EFA Report.

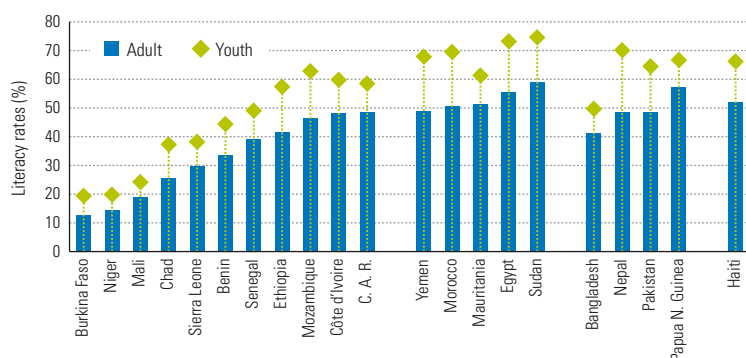
Figure 3.2: Global and regional trends in gender parity of adult literacy rates, 1970 to 2000–2004



Source: See Chapter 7 in the full EFA Report.

literacy rate from 75% to 88% between 1970 and 2000-2004; the corresponding rates for developing countries were 66% and 85%. Interestingly, literacy disparities favouring young women in the 15-24 age group are observed in an increasing number of countries, a trend most pronounced in Latin America and the Caribbean, in eastern and southern Africa and in countries with high literacy rates. Worldwide, however, more than 132 million young people are still unable to read and write even at a minimum level. (Figure 3.3)

Figure 3.3: Youth and adult literacy rates for selected countries, 2000–2004



Source: See Chapter 7 in the full EFA Report

Strong correlations between illiteracy and poverty

In most instances, where poverty rates are higher, literacy rates tend to be lower. This is true among and within countries. Illiteracy tends to prevail in low-income countries where severe poverty is widespread.

In Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique and Nepal, for example, where 78% or more of the population lives below US\$2 per day, adult literacy rates are below 63%, and the number of adult illiterates exceeds 5 million in each country.

The links between poverty and illiteracy can also be studied at the household level, where evidence from thirty developing countries indicates that literacy correlates with wealth. In seven sub-Saharan African countries with particularly low overall literacy rates, the literacy gap between the poorest and wealthiest households is more than forty percentage points, and the gap is nearly always greater for women than for men. Even in countries where the overall rate is above 90%, literacy disparities by household wealth exist.

Literacy rates tend to be lower in rural than in urban areas. In countries where overall literacy rates are comparatively low, there are tremendous disparities: 44% rural vs 72% urban in Pakistan, and 24% rural vs 83% urban in Ethiopia. In addition, disparities are found within rural and urban areas. Pastoralist and nomadic populations, who number in the tens of millions across the African drylands, the Middle East and parts of Asia, tend to have lower literacy levels than other rural populations. In the rural Afar region of Ethiopia, for example, in 1999 the overall adult literacy rate was 25%, but the rate in pastoralist areas was 8%. In urban areas, as studies from China and Egypt illustrate, migrants from the countryside are at a disadvantage compared with the urban-born.

Excluded groups

For complex social, cultural or political reasons, certain population groups find themselves excluded from mainstream society, a phenomenon often resulting in reduced access to formal education and literacy programmes. Knowledge about their literacy is limited, since such groups are often omitted from census or household-based assessments, but the tendency is for literacy rates to be lower in these groups, which include:

- **Indigenous peoples:** The world's approximately 300-350 million indigenous people speak about 4,000 to 5,000 languages and live in more than 70 countries. Available evidence suggests that significant disparities exist between indigenous and non-indigenous populations. Limited access to formal schooling is clearly a factor. The national literacy rate in Ecuador, for example, is 91% (2001 census figures), but the rate is 72% for indigenous groups. In Viet Nam, the national rate is 87%, against 4% for some indigenous groups. Nepal's minority Dalit population has a significantly lower adult literacy rate than the rest of the population. Roma in Central Europe have weaker literacy skills than majority populations. Indigenous women tend to have particularly low literacy rates.

Migration, both international and within countries, raises demand for literacy skills among migrants themselves and family members who remain behind

- *People with disabilities:* Over 600 million people (about 10% of the world's population), two-thirds of whom live in low-income countries, have a disability of one form or another. It is estimated that 35% of all out-of-school children have disabilities, that fewer than 2% of children with a disability are enrolled in school and that over 90% of children with disabilities in Africa have never attended school. Even in Canada and Australia, more than 40% of disabled children have only completed primary education. Limited data suggest, in addition, that gender disparities in literacy rates are greater for people with disabilities.
- *Migrants:* Migration, both international and within countries, has grown dramatically in recent decades. It raises demand for literacy skills among migrants themselves and family members who remain behind. Internal migrants often face considerable difficulties when moving from one region to another: a literate migrant from a rural community might become 'illiterate' in an urban one that uses different written languages and more advanced communication systems.

Projections for adult literacy

The wording of the literacy goal is problematic: strictly speaking, a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy is impossible for countries that already have literacy rates above 67%. This Report therefore interprets goal 4 as implying a 50% reduction in illiteracy rates, consistent with the wording of the 1990 Jomtien conference that initiated the EFA movement. For the following analysis, countries with literacy rates above 97% are considered as having achieved universal literacy. No country of the Arab States, South and West Asia, or sub-Saharan Africa is close to this. (Table 3.3)

A distinction was drawn between countries progressing relatively slowly and those moving rapidly towards high literacy. Projections could be run for ninety-two countries, including nineteen that have literacy rates above 97% (most of them in Europe and Central Asia). The results for the remaining seventy-three countries show that:

- Twenty-three stand a fairly high chance of meeting goal 4, as their already relatively high literacy rates are increasing quickly.
- Twenty countries, many in Latin America and the Caribbean, are at risk of not meeting the goal, given the current pace of increase in their literacy rates, even though the rates are already quite high.
- Thirty countries are at serious risk of not achieving the goal by 2015 because their literacy rates are very low and increasing too slowly. Most of these countries are in Africa, but India, Nepal, Pakistan and several Latin American countries are also among the thirty.

Table 3.3: Country prospects for achieving the adult literacy target by 2015

Level of adult literacy rate in 2000–2004	High literacy (between 80% and 97%)	QUADRANT I At risk of not achieving the goal 20 countries Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, Malaysia, Mauritius, Myanmar, Namibia, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, Saint Lucia, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Swaziland, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, Viet Nam	QUADRANT II High chance of achieving the goal 23 countries Bahrain, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, China, Cyprus, Equatorial Guinea, Greece, Israel, Jordan, Macao (China), Maldives, Mexico, Palestinian Autonomous Territories, Paraguay, Republic of Moldova, Saudi Arabia, Serbia and Montenegro, Singapore, Thailand, TFYR Macedonia, Venezuela
	Low literacy (below 80%)	QUADRANT IV Serious risk of not achieving the goal 30 countries Algeria, Angola, Belize, Benin, Burundi, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Guatemala, India, Kenya, Lao PDR, Madagascar, Mauritania, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, U.R. of Tanzania, Zambia	QUADRANT III Low chance of achieving the goal None
		Slow performers	Fast performers
		Increase between 1990 and 2000–2004	

Direct measures of literacy: a more accurate picture

The statistics presented so far are almost exclusively based on the indirect assessments of literacy described above under 'How literacy is conventionally measured' (p. 18). Alternative measurement methods seek to give a more nuanced and accurate picture. They incorporate direct assessment and the testing of literacy skills on sliding scales rather than dichotomously, and conceive of literacy as a multidimensional phenomenon, embracing a variety of skill domains.

Direct assessments tend to show that conventional evaluation methods often overstate literacy levels. In Morocco, 45% of respondents in a sample reported being literate, but only 33% demonstrated basic competence in literacy. Similar patterns are found in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Nicaragua and the United Republic of Tanzania. Among Ethiopian women with one year of schooling, 59% were considered literate by household assessments yet only 27% passed a simple reading test. Direct assessments of literacy indicate that the educational threshold at which a national literacy rate of 90% is achieved varies considerably, ranging from four to nine years of schooling, and in most cases reflects the quality of education provided. Indeed, schooling thresholds for widespread literacy appear to be higher than previously assumed, though the variability of quality makes this hard to assess.

The International Adult Literacy Survey, conducted in some twenty developed countries in three phases (1994, 1996 and 1998), was unprecedented in its scale. It measured proficiency in prose, document and quantitative literacy, and compiled socio-economic background information on individuals. The tests used can measure, for example, ability to understand an instruction manual or a news story, to locate information in a job application, and to calculate the amount of interest on a loan. The survey categorized individuals into five literacy levels on a scale from 0 to 500 points, rather than as 'literate' or 'illiterate'. Findings indicated that significant proportions of the adult population possess relatively weak literacy and numeracy skills. (Figure 3.4)

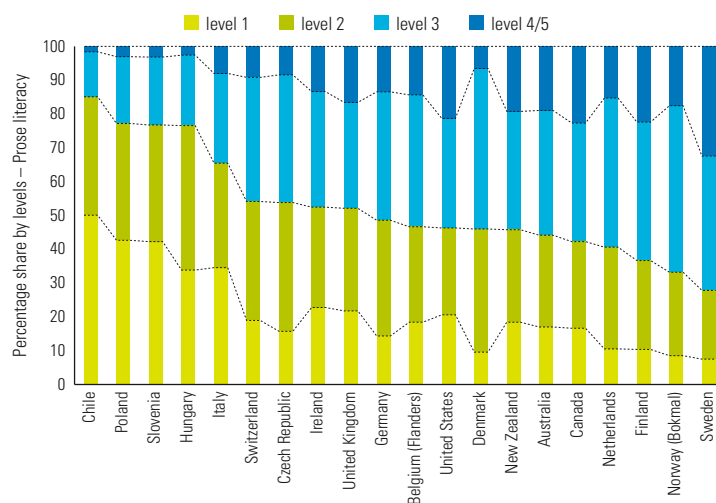
Several developing countries are designing literacy surveys to provide more accurate knowledge about literacy. The China Adult Literacy Survey reported the skills levels of various populations in the urban labour force. It singled out areas in which migrants and women are discriminated against in the labour market and identified routes to increasing opportunities for lifelong learning. In Brazil, four surveys have been carried out since 2001 to measure adult literacy levels based on skills testing, with the aim of generating strong public commitment towards literacy. Botswana has conducted two national literacy surveys that constitute a milestone in its effort to provide decision-makers with a reliable database. The UNESCO Institute

for Statistics is designing a direct literacy assessment project, the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP), aimed at informing policy by providing reliable, comparable estimates of functional literacy and numeracy skills. LAMP pilot projects are being carried out in several developing countries. When fully implemented, LAMP is intended to replace indirect assessment of literacy in censuses or household surveys.

Common criticisms of large-scale alternative assessments concern their high cost and a limited sense of 'ownership' by local and national agencies. The time required to conduct such assessments does not always permit governments and decision-makers to respond to literacy needs with timely policies. Clearly, it is nevertheless crucial to improve the measurement of literacy, notably by strengthening the direct assessment of literacy skills and practices, and enhancing related technical capacity. Literacy modules currently under development, which could be incorporated into household surveys carried out in developing countries, would be a valuable tool. More – and more regular – direct assessments are needed to allow countries to make informed policy decisions, but they must be relatively simple, rapid and inexpensive.

Direct assessments tend to show that conventional evaluation methods often overstate literacy levels

Figure 3.4: Distribution of adults by level of prose literacy proficiency, 1994–1998



Note: The figure shows the distribution of adults by level of prose literacy proficiency, defined as the ability to understand and use information from texts such as news articles or fiction. Results were categorized into five different levels (1 being the lowest and 5 the highest), based on an analysis of the skills represented by the type of tasks successfully completed by the reader. Countries are listed in ascending order based on mean results for prose literacy.

Source: See Chapter 7 in the full EFA Report.

Transitions to widespread literacy: how do they happen?

Adult literacy rates, measured conventionally, have been steadily rising in recent decades. Today, more than 80% of the global population over age 15 is reported to possess at least minimal reading and writing skills. This reflects an unprecedented social transformation since the mid-nineteenth century, when only about 10% of the world's adults could read or write. The dramatic increase in adult literacy rates happened despite the quintupling of the world population, from about 1.2 billion in 1850 to over 6.4 billion today.

The expansion of formal schooling is the single most important factor driving the spread of literacy worldwide over the past two centuries

What drove this transformation? The spread of formal schooling, well-organized literacy campaigns and policies supporting adult learning opportunities have all played influential roles in expanding access to literacy. The broader social context is equally powerful: the motivations to become and remain literate are closely related to the quality of the literate environments found at home, at work and in society. Language policies also had a decisive incidence on the spread of literacy.

Schools are the key factor

The expansion of formal schooling is the single most important factor driving the spread of literacy worldwide over the past two centuries, and especially the past fifty years. Its impact spans historical periods and geography. Schools have been, and continue to be, the place where most people acquire their core literacy skills.⁷

In certain Nordic countries and German principalities, as in Scotland and many North American colonies, the Protestant Reformation encouraged parents in the seventeenth century to teach their children how to read and write. In the eighteenth century, communities in northern Europe established local schools with largely religious curricula. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, systems of compulsory mass schooling were established in

Europe, somewhat later in the east than in the west. Nascent states passed compulsory attendance laws. As formal schooling spread and enrolments increased, adult literacy rates also began to rise.

Countries in South and Central America passed compulsory schooling laws in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but often did not enforce them. In Asia, Africa and the Arab world, various forms of formal education were well established prior to contact with the west. Oriented chiefly towards teaching religion and traditional culture, they were transformed, assimilated or eliminated as missionaries and colonial authorities introduced European school models. In parts of Asia, modernizing regimes adapted European models to local contexts (e.g. in Japan and Korea in the late nineteenth century). Though unequal power relations certainly characterized these contacts, the record suggests that they initiated a process of expanding access to formal schooling. There is convincing evidence that, between 1880 and 1940, the establishment and expansion of formal schooling systems contributed to rising adult literacy levels.

Campaigns for mass literacy and national programmes to promote adult learning

Many countries organized mass, multi-year campaigns to promote literacy, often against a backdrop of nation-building, societal transformation and sometimes decolonization. Socialist/Communist governments were particularly active; by the end of the 1919-39 Soviet campaign, an early example, 85% of the population was literate, compared with 30% before. China and Viet Nam organized a series of campaigns from the 1940s to the 1980s that were relatively effective in reaching large segments of the illiterate adult population. In the United Republic of Tanzania, the adult literacy rate almost doubled from an estimated 33% in 1967 to 61% in 1975, alongside the rapid expansion of primary education. That campaign involved recruitment of literacy instructors, distribution of over 1 million pairs of eyeglasses and the printing of huge numbers of books and documents. Ethiopia's national literacy campaign from 1979 to 1983 established some 450,000 literacy centres and reached over 22 million people, of whom over 20 million passed a beginners' literacy test. Non-socialist countries that conducted mass campaigns include Thailand, where the first of several successful literacy campaigns ran from 1942 to 1945, and Brazil, which conducted several large-scale campaigns in the twentieth century alongside the sustained expansion of its public education system.

Shorter campaigns also deserve mention. Often initiated by newly installed regimes in countries with a principal majority language, they sometimes resulted

7. This emphasis on the determining impact of schooling is not meant to negate economic, political, cultural and demographic factors, including the impact of urbanization, which this Report recognizes but does not examine.

in significant reductions of illiteracy. Cuba's 1961 campaign, fuelled by social justice concerns, made more than 700,000 people literate in the space of one year. Literacy rates increased from 76% to 96%. In Viet Nam, they rose from 75% to 86% as a result of the 1976-77 campaign, in Nicaragua, from 50% to 77% in the country's 1979-80 drive. Many short campaigns have involved follow-up initiatives to provide adults with continuing learning opportunities.

In other contexts, governments have expanded access to adult learning opportunities, typically to complement and sustain UPE. Such programmes often form part of broader government policies to address multiple development objectives. Projects on a much smaller scale than mass campaigns have been targeted at often excluded segments of the adult population. For example, several African countries have implemented literacy programmes in local languages to better reach learners. In Peru, several NGOs have adopted a system of literacy education that begins in vernacular Quechua and gradually moves to Spanish.

Widespread literacy can never be considered a won cause. Economic decline and political crisis can lead to stagnation in schooling and literacy, even in countries with high education indicators (Box 3.1). Prolonged armed conflict can also have dramatic consequences for education systems (Box 1.1).

In addition, pockets of illiteracy persist in highly literate and schooled societies. International surveys reveal that even in developed countries where most adults perform well (e.g. Nordic countries), about 10% have skill levels barely above the minimal threshold

Box 3.1 Literacy stagnation in transition countries

Before the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, high literacy levels prevailed in the Trans-Caucasus and Central Asia. A slump in industrial output led to drastic cuts in health and education spending, and to increases in poverty and economic inequality. In some areas, ethnic and military conflicts exacerbated the crisis. New laws favoured the use of national languages at the expense of Russian, but speakers of national languages became, in relative terms, 'functionally illiterate', as their languages often lacked the specialized terminology, technical systems, translators and educational materials necessary to quickly replace Russian in a wide spectrum of economic and social arenas. Similarly, Mongolia experienced a deep economic crisis in the early 1990s when it began the transition from a planned economy. Public education spending dropped and many children from rural areas left school to help their families look after newly privatized livestock. By 2000, literacy rates among young adults (aged 15-19) were lower than for older Mongolians. The government initiated several programmes, using open and distance learning, to reach widely scattered rural learners.

due to factors such as poverty, low socio-economic status, ill health and disabilities. Adults whose mother tongue is different from the language of instruction also tend to have lower literacy levels. Missed opportunities to acquire sustainable literacy skills during childhood and adolescence can be compounded during adulthood, especially among those with limited employment opportunities. ■

A group of adults in Peru participate in a literacy class funded by the government.



■ *Change begins with strong political commitment. Governments should have explicit literacy policies focused on schools, adult literacy and the literate environment*

■ *Strong, coordinated government leadership is needed, integrating all concerned ministries and sectors, dovetailed with local implementation and community ownership*

■ *Partnerships between central and local government and civil society are essential to put literacy on all agendas*

■ *Adult programmes must understand how people use their literacy skills, and respond to the priorities of learners*

Part IV. Good policy, good meeting the literacy

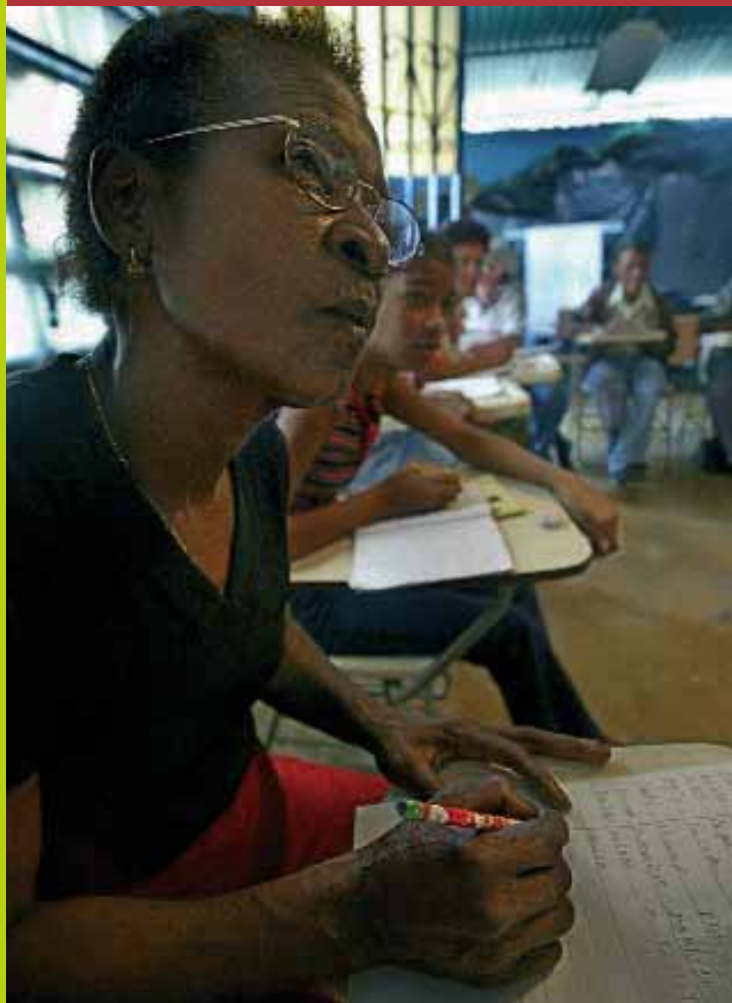
■ *It is imperative to professionalize, pay and invest in literacy educators*

■ *Language policy, including multilingualism, is crucial*

■ *Print materials have a positive influence on literacy achievement*

■ *National financing strategies, including higher public spending, are required*

A woman deeply engaged in a literacy class in Venezuela.



© AFP / Juan Barreto

As this Report shows, countries face a daunting task if they are to take their commitments seriously: close to 800 million people are unable to exercise the right to literacy and survey data suggest that the figure may be much higher. Large numbers possess weak literacy skills after several years in school, or lose them over time. Even in highly developed countries, certain particularly disadvantaged groups may be held back by low education levels. In both developed and developing countries, globalization and the growth of the knowledge economy are creating demand for new literacy skills. In addition to the EFA literacy goal's quantitative target focused on individual skills, a broad understanding of literacy implies the wider aim of building literate societies.

Literacy is more than a single goal; it is at the centre of the whole EFA endeavour. That is why this Report calls for a three-pronged strategy encompassing (a) quality schooling for all children, (b) scaled up literacy programmes for youth and adults, and (c) the development of environments conducive to the meaningful use of literacy. This approach recognizes both the individual and the broader social dimension of literacy. For the poorest countries, sustained investment in universal, good-quality primary education is critical. But simply waiting for UPE will not suffice. Youth and adult literacy programmes must be

Literacy is more than a single goal; it is at the centre of the whole EFA endeavour

practice – challenge

scaled up. Appropriate language, book, media and information policies are needed to develop environments in which literacy can flourish and be valued.

Strategic imperatives

Strong and sustained political commitment to the three-pronged strategy for literacy is the starting point for stepping up progress. This Report calls on governments to develop explicit literacy policies for all three foundations of literacy, and to place literacy firmly within education sector plans and poverty reduction strategies. Only then are the necessary institutional, human and financial resources likely to be provided.

Explicit policies imply political commitment. This is urgently needed for youth and adult literacy beyond formal school systems. Regardless of learner motivation, regular attendance of literacy programmes ebbs without constant public support. Where significant gains have been achieved, both national and local leaders have stressed the value of literacy for nation-building and development. Political commitment, popular enthusiasm and attention to language of instruction all played their part in the success of mass literacy campaigns. Broader public policies and well-coordinated partnerships have also been key to positive outcomes. Whatever the preferred route, the scaling up of literacy programmes has to be part of a major national endeavour. Business as usual is not enough. Relatively few governments have coherent, long-term national literacy policies encompassing attention to governance, programme design and delivery, human and financial resources, and the promotion of an environment in which individuals are encouraged to become literate and to sustain their skills.

Strong leadership. Ministries of education have prime responsibility for literacy policy: they are best placed to integrate literacy into education sector strategies, promote lifelong learning, coordinate publicly financed programmes and partnerships, and regulate accreditation systems. In practice, responsibility for literacy is often shared by several ministries.

Botswana, Eritrea, Namibia and Thailand are among countries where education ministries have well-established adult or non-formal education units overseeing literacy programmes. Burkina Faso and Morocco have set up separate state structures for literacy and non-formal education to better coordinate policy. In many countries, management structures are decentralized and aim to coordinate public, private and civil society literacy providers. In others, independent national agencies oversee adult literacy. Central guidance and coordination has to be dovetailed with local implementation and community ownership.

Initiating literacy campaigns, national programmes and broad partnerships is complex: national, regional and local management structures need to be set up, materials developed, and coordinators and facilitators recruited and trained. India's district-level Total Literacy Campaign, launched in 1992, is a successful example of a highly targeted, large-scale national programme. It mobilized community resources and set up centres offering continuing education. By March 2003, 98 million adults had become literate through this campaign. In most countries, however, literacy activities are small and run by NGOs, including religious bodies. They face challenges similar to those of larger programmes in terms of funding, staff, materials and community support. Scaling up local good practice is particularly difficult. In Ghana, for example, an expanded training programme requiring joint backing by government and NGOs could not finance those incentives, such as transport and meal allowances, that pilot programmes had demonstrated to be important.

Partnerships are vital. They are diverse, involving religious groups, trade unions, private companies, universities, the media and local authorities. Partnerships are often threatened, however, by fragmentation or even competition. In Uganda, for example, while the government has encouraged pluralism in literacy provision, many initiatives operate without reference to each other and tend to be limited in coverage. Senegal's 'faire-faire' model is managed by an agency set up to outsource adult literacy provision to NGOs and small entrepreneurs. Despite serious programme quality problems, this approach is spreading to other West African countries. In Brazil, the government's Literate Brazil Programme relies on close partnerships with local governments and large NGOs with experience in adult literacy. In many Asian countries, community learning centres combine education with community development activities,

enabling constructive partnerships between government and civil society. Putting literacy on everyone's agenda, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of different agencies, and establishing national coordination mechanisms among and between providers are essential for effective literacy programmes.

The nuts and bolts of youth and adult literacy programmes

Learners' knowledge and wishes should inform adult learning programmes and be their starting point – an axiom that is not applied uniformly. Whatever their objectives, all such programmes require attention to curriculum and pedagogy, learners' schedules, the training and status of literacy educators, the learning technology used and the language of learning, as well as to the broader environment in which individuals practise their literacy skills. The following are some essential dimensions of good practice.

1. Curricula and pedagogy: relevance, learning materials and participation

A relevant curriculum is conducive to better learning outcomes. Curricula must respect and build on the demands of learners and their diverse circumstances. Sensitivity to the adult learner's cultural background, mother tongue and life experience is required. Understanding how men and women use their literacy skills in various settings can provide valuable insights for the design of appropriate literacy programmes. A recent study in Ghana, for instance, showed that

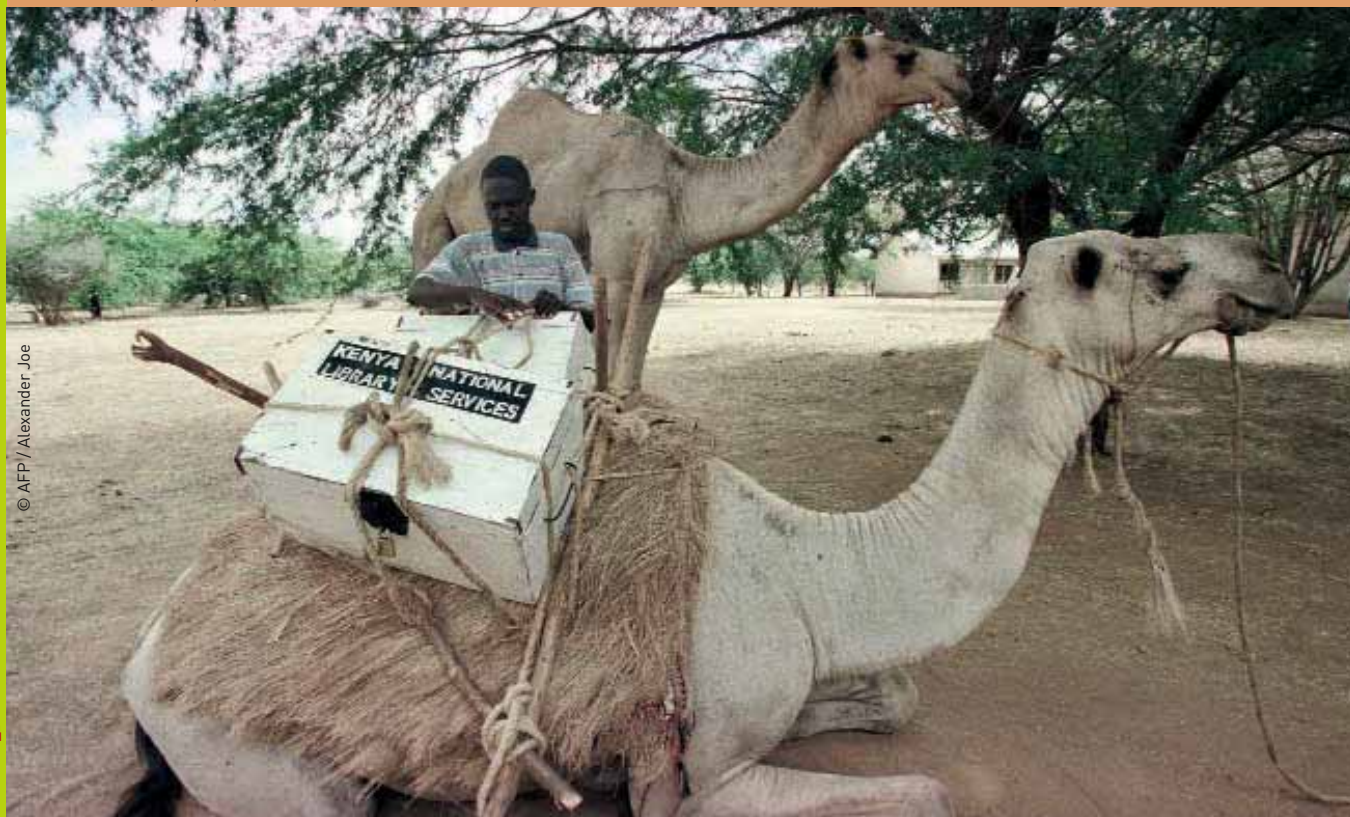
among the uses to which learners put their newly acquired literacy skills were helping children with homework, administering medical prescriptions properly, communicating with government offices, writing letters, reading religious texts and opening savings accounts.

To respond to such diverse needs and motivations, clear, appropriate and realistic goals should define the 'why' of the curriculum. From this should flow the 'what' – specific learning objectives that provide clear statements of intent for learners, expressed in terms of skills, their application and wider social engagement. The curriculum should strike a balance between relevance to local contexts and to wider opportunities. A frequent mistake is to incorporate training for income-generating activities too rapidly into literacy education, and using instructors insufficiently qualified to deal with both.

Literacy teaching is often hindered by a lack of learning materials. In Senegal, a study found that many literacy classes were taught orally. Adult literacy books tend to be characterized by poor content and design. They may also contain images and themes that seem to validate inequalities, as in the case of primers that focus on women's domestic roles and ignore their participation in agriculture or the labour market.

Participatory, learner-centred methods are essential for adults. Critical pedagogy argues that, for true learning to happen, the voices of marginalized groups must be heard and fully engaged in the learning process. The norm, however, is still a formal, basic skills approach with emphasis on mastering reading, writing and numeracy within a specified time.

In Garissa, Kenya, a mobile librarian unloads his camel laden with books.



2. Organizing learning groups

As adult learners are largely voluntary, family demands, agricultural cycles and other circumstances can affect programme attendance. To minimize this problem, programmes must have sensible timetables, use suitable locations, and be sensitive to age and gender issues (for example, to attend literacy courses, women must often seek the agreement of the male head of the family). Uganda's strategy calls for training 40,000 literacy instructors, at least half to be women, in reaction to a situation in which 70% of adult illiterates are women while most literacy educators are men. In Burkina Faso, child care is provided to enable mothers to concentrate on their courses. In India, the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Uttar Pradesh and the Women's Development Programme in Rajasthan run residential literacy camps so that women can be free from domestic pressures while they learn.

Most literacy programmes run 300 to 400 hours over an average of two years. A survey by ActionAid and the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) suggests, however, that to achieve lasting literacy, about 600 hours are needed, delivered in two weekly sessions of two to three hours. Funding shortfalls and dependence on external donors make it hard for many programmes to provide such regularity.

The library is an ideal place to offer family literacy programmes, as it provides materials for all age groups and reading levels. Although often under-resourced, libraries and community learning centres can offer space for classes as well as reading materials. In Botswana, village reading rooms have been set up to extend library services to literacy programme graduates.

3. Literacy educators: improving their status

Instructors are vital to the success of literacy programmes, but they are paid little if any regular remuneration, lack job security, have few training opportunities and rarely benefit from ongoing professional support. Many have no previous teaching experience. Unless the professional development of literacy educators and their trainers is taken seriously, progress towards more literate societies will be severely constrained. This matter must be given national attention in literacy policy and practice. It cannot be something added on if resources permit.

Training of literacy educators, where it exists, is often in a national official language while their work is carried out in local ones. Training in numeracy teaching is especially rare and inadequate. Most non-formal training courses last one to two weeks, include no assessment and generally give no accreditation. In Uganda, for example, educators in the government's functional adult literacy programme receive a few days of training with very little supervision. Training of trainers for adult literacy educators is also neglected; where it exists, it tends to be overly formal, without

attention to practice. Formal training programmes for literacy educators often run from one to three years. Delivered through institutions or through open and distance learning, such courses, leading to accreditation, are common in southern Africa and parts of Latin America, and are starting up in Asia. Their contribution to the professionalization of literacy educators is profound, but they are too lengthy to enable the rapid scaling up of literacy programmes.

Interesting training innovations exist. Mozambique offers literacy educators with Grade 7 schooling the chance to upgrade their formal education and eventually be employed as full-time teachers in literacy programmes. In Brazil, certain courses lead to certification as specialist teachers in adult and youth education. Some training programmes include provision for ongoing support following the training. Out of sixty programmes surveyed for this Report, over one-third offered some follow-up.

Literacy educators are paid little, lack job security, have few training opportunities and rarely benefit from ongoing professional support

Worldwide, conditions of employment for adult literacy educators are very poor, especially compared to those of teachers in formal education. This situation results in frequent turnover, with serious implications for programme quality. The GCE/ActionAid survey, covering sixty-seven programmes around the world, revealed that half of the literacy educators involved were paid an honorarium or stipend, 25% received the national minimum wage and about 20% were unpaid. Most programmes paid between one-fourth and one-half of a basic primary-school teacher's salary. Survey respondents cited better pay and training for literacy educators and more reading materials as primary concerns.

4. New learning technology: recognizing constraints

Distance learning and information and communication technology (ICT) can provide opportunities for informal and non-formal literacy learning by adults, though access to technology is highly uneven in many contexts. China, India and Mexico have conducted adult basic education using radio and television broadcasting. Locally produced interactive radio instruction and community radio can promote exchange between learners and programme providers, especially for widely scattered or mobile communities such as nomads. South Africa is experimenting with computer software for teaching literacy, but this is not an affordable option for large-scale provision with very low

literacy rates. Cuba's 'Yo, sí puedo' programme, using radio and video to enrich literacy teaching, has been adopted in several Latin American countries and New Zealand.

Given constraints in access, ICT and distance learning have more immediate potential for offering professional development to literacy educators rather than for running programmes per se.

Although television is not accessible to much of the world's population, it does reach large audiences in many countries. Its potential as a channel for promoting literacy is considerable.

5. Developing multilingual policies

Language and literacy are inextricably linked. A majority of countries facing salient literacy challenges are linguistically diverse. In what language should schools teach and adult programmes be conducted? How should both integrate multilingualism to enhance the literacy prospects of all? Decisions on language must balance political and ethnic sensitivity, pedagogical effectiveness, costs and learner preferences.

The designation of official language(s) and the choice of languages taught in schools and adult learning programmes are sensitive issues. The basic features of a language influence the ways in which students learn. Different skills are required to master different script systems (alphabets vs ideograms, for instance). The oral and written forms of a language may serve distinct purposes. Modern standard Arabic, for example, is used by many countries as the national or official language, but differs from the diverse forms of spoken Arabic. Lack of correspondence between the spoken and written languages can pose a particular problem for learners.

Initial education in the mother tongue is widely recognized to be positive for a child's cognitive development. Learning how to read and write in a maternal language facilitates access to literacy in other languages. Language diversity need not be a barrier to literacy acquisition: in Papua New Guinea, where over 800 languages are spoken, primary pupils start education in their mother tongue and gradually shift to English.

The use of vernaculars in adult programmes is pedagogically sound, encourages community mobilization and social development, and provides for political voice. Using only the local language as a learning medium, however, can be a barrier to broader participation in a country's social, economic and political life. Adult learners themselves often express a



demand for literacy in a regional and/or national language. In the United Republic of Tanzania, literacy programmes in Swahili proved far more popular than ones in local languages.

Balancing these factors is not easy. The key features of an inclusive multilingual policy should be based on:

- studies of the linguistic and socio-linguistic situation, including attitudes of communities towards the languages they use and towards official languages;
- consultations with local communities as an input to learning and to the governance of adult programmes;
- locally written and produced teaching materials;
- the addition of second (and third) languages that take account of learners' competence and knowledge.

The extra cost of training teachers and developing materials in multiple languages must be weighed against the inefficiency of teaching in languages that learners do not understand.

6. Literate environments: nurturing learning

Printed and visual materials in households, neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces and the community encourages individuals to become literate and to integrate their literacy skills in their everyday lives. Comparative studies of educational achievement and literacy proficiency show that the quantity and use of literacy resources matter. A recent study in thirty-five countries found that exposure to home-based literacy activities was positively related to Grade 4 reading achievement. The International Adult Learning Survey found that the extent to which respondents read books and newspapers, visited public libraries and watched television was significantly associated with literacy proficiency in some twenty OECD countries.

While research clearly shows that home and school literacy environments significantly contribute to reading and language achievement, many pupils grow up in impoverished literacy environments, lacking a bare minimum of written material. According to the Southern African Consortium on Monitoring Educational Quality, at least 70% of students reported having fewer than ten books in their homes. In all but four countries, only 20% to 40% of the schools had libraries. Many Grade 6 pupils reported that their classrooms had no books at all. In remote communities of Asia, Latin America and Africa, the circulation of newspapers, books and magazines is often severely limited.

Policies related to book publishing, the media and access to information affect the literate environment and are intricately linked to the building of literate societies. Many countries harness the potential of the print and broadcast media to promote literacy. Quite a few have developed special publications aimed at individuals with minimal skills and at the expansion of literacy in local languages. Others have used radio and television in conjunction with literacy programmes and initiated listening groups to maximize the impact of specialized broadcasts.

Financing literacy: the costs of scaling up

People in low-income countries have very limited ability to pay for educational activities. The scaling up of adult literacy programmes requires, first, a coordinated national financing strategy. Budgetary allocations to literacy must increase, and not at the expense of investment in the quality of schooling. Investing in the wider literacy environment to stimulate the production of materials suitable for new readers is also important. Second, mechanisms should be developed to mobilize local resources, taking care to ensure that no one in the community is ever barred from literacy programmes because of cost. Third, governments and national NGOs can form partnerships with the private sector, donor agencies and international NGOs.

Although reliable data on funding for youth and adult literacy are scarce, evidence suggests that the level is very low in most developing countries, both in the aggregate and in terms of the priority given literacy in national and education sector budgets. In many countries, literacy programmes represent just 1% of the total national education budget. Calculating overall support is difficult, since governments may spread funds over several ministries and programmes may be run by NGOs, employers and donors.

Discussion of long-term financing must first assess some of the basic cost parameters for good-quality literacy programmes. These include start-up costs, training, development and printing of learning materials, payment of literacy educators and operating costs. All are difficult to standardize. For a recent sample of twenty-nine literacy programmes, the average cost per learner came to US\$47 in sub-Saharan Africa, US\$30 in Asia and US\$61 in Latin America. The averages per 'successful' learner – one having completed the programme – were, respectively, US\$68, US\$32 and US\$83. In Senegal's literacy and poverty alleviation programme, the unit cost for one adult learner is US\$50 – broadly equivalent to the cost of one year of primary schooling.

Policy-makers need to come up with baseline figures for significantly expanding national programmes. The key consideration is salary and training costs for literacy educators. Relying on volunteers is not a long-term solution. The GCE/ActionAid study recommends that literacy educators should be paid at least the equivalent of the minimum primary school teacher's pay, for all hours worked. This benchmark raises difficult questions, as governments are already under pressure to pay primary school teachers a decent wage. A minimum period of training is also required: the same study recommends that facilitators should receive at least fourteen days of initial training and regular refresher sessions. Such costs represent a major investment, one that will have to be met not just by governments

but also by the private sector and donors. Production of learning materials is a third important cost, which varies considerably depending on the pedagogy used. The extent to which government and other actors are prepared to invest in free or subsidized newspapers, local and national language editions of materials and the provision of travelling libraries also deserves consideration. Other items include management and other overhead, as well as monitoring and evaluation, which are all too rare in literacy programmes.

Preliminary, broad-brush work on the magnitude of additional costs that might be incurred if major progress is to be made towards the Dakar literacy goal was commissioned for this Report. It suggests that US\$26 billion is required over the 13 years to 2015 to enable more than 550 million people (nearly half in South and West Asia) to complete a literacy programme of 400 hours. The financial challenge is greatest in South and West Asia, while relative costs are highest in the Arab States. This work offers an indicative framework to stimulate policy debate in countries, where assumptions can be varied according to context.⁸ The figures and conclusions involved should be read with caution, since the data are limited and many fundamental assumptions are made. The range of estimates is broad – between US\$10 billion and US\$50 billion over the next ten years. Because this work calculates costs since 2002, at least US\$2.5 billion a year would likely now be needed, a tall order for both countries and the international community.

Most governments need to be much more active in researching, financing, expanding and coordinating literacy policy and practice through schools, youth and adult literacy programmes and the broader environment. Benchmarks developed by the GCE and ActionAid can stimulate debate on literacy. They include attention to governance, evaluation, educators, pedagogy and financing, all discussed above. No matter what approach is chosen, political commitment is the obligatory pre-condition for meeting the ambitious targets that many governments have set for their countries. In turn, it will rely on technical capacity, adequate financing and international support, discussed below. ■

US\$26 billion is required to 2015 to enable more than 550 million people to complete a literacy programme of 400 hours

8. A dynamic presentation of the study, available on the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* website from 9 November 2005, will let users alter the costing assumptions for individual countries on a spreadsheet and develop tailored estimates of the costs of achieving the Dakar literacy goal.

■ *Bilateral aid is increasing, but education's share is declining*

■ *Aid to basic education has increased, but double the amount of current pledges is needed*

■ *Post-secondary education still receives twice as much bilateral aid as basic education*

■ *Donors give short shrift to literacy*

Part V. International commitments: time to act

■ *The poorest countries do not necessarily receive education aid*

■ *Despite the needs, South and West Asia receives low priority from donors*

■ *Long-term, predictable aid can help governments meet recurrent education costs*

■ *The Fast Track Initiative receives strong political backing but slow mobilization of resources*

■ *Debate is needed on how to coordinate technical assistance in education*

At the end of the school day, children leave their classrooms set up in old school buses in Qunu, South Africa.



© AFP PHOTO / Alexander JOE

Several high-profile meetings in 2005 raised expectations that the international community would boost support to sharply reduce poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. The signs are that some significant breakthroughs are being made. The G8 countries agreed to debt relief for some of the world's poorest countries. Donors made commitments that could increase overall aid by more than 50% by 2010. Education should benefit from these developments, but funding still falls short of what is needed to achieve even a limited number of the EFA goals in the world's poorest countries.

A slow upward trend

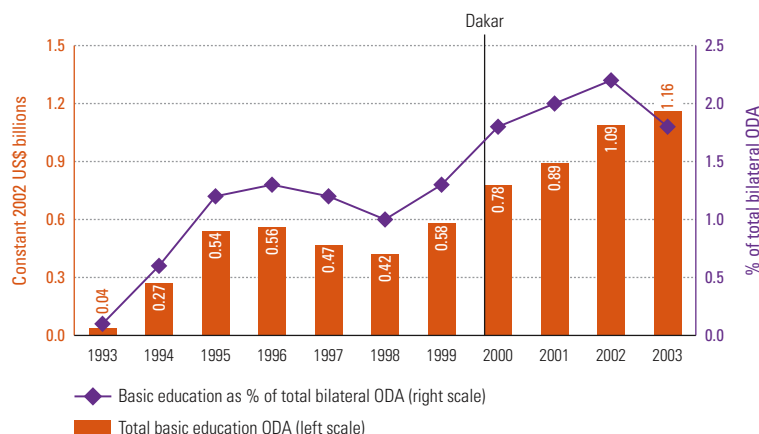
Official Development Assistance (ODA) increased in real terms by 4% from 2002 to 2003, and preliminary figures indicate a further 5% increase for 2004. ODA is at the highest level ever recorded, though as a share of donors' aggregate gross national income (0.25%) it is still well below the average recorded up to the early 1990s (0.33%) and the United Nations target of 0.7%. Overall, the least developed countries receive about one-third of total ODA. With some notable exceptions, these are the countries with the poorest EFA indicators.

Bilateral aid to education increased to US\$4.65 billion in 2003, a 31% increase over its 2000 low of US\$3.55 billion but still well below the 1990 high of US\$5.7 billion (all at constant 2002 prices). The 2003 allocation represented 7.4% of total bilateral aid, down from 8.8% in the previous year and the lowest share in ten years. Bilateral aid to basic education almost trebled between 1998 and 2003 but still accounted for less than 2% of bilateral ODA. (Figure 5.1 and Table 5.1)

Major multilateral aid agencies committed US\$15.9 billion per year on average between 1999 and 2003, with education receiving 9.3%. Basic education received about 60% of this amount. The World Bank is the most important multilateral donor to education (US\$543 million per year from 1999 to 2003, equivalent to more than 40% of total multilateral commitments). The European Commission is an increasingly important donor to the sector at US\$347 million per year over the period. Combining bilateral and multilateral aid, total aid to basic education amounted to US\$2.1 billion in 2003, only 2.6% of overall aid.

Debt relief accounted for US\$5.9 billion of the nominal US\$16.6 billion increase in total bilateral aid between 2001 and 2003. To receive irrevocable debt relief, countries must usually demonstrate that they have policies and goals designed to achieve basic education objectives, among other social reforms. Examples are elimination of school fees, measures to hire teachers and provision of textbooks. Several heavily indebted poor countries have increased government expenditure on poverty reduction and

Figure 5.1: Bilateral aid commitments to basic education, 1993–2003



Source: See Chapter 4 in the full EFA Report.

Table 5.1: Total ODA for education and basic education, 1999–2003

	1999–2003 average		2003	
	Education	Basic education	Education	Basic education
Bilateral donors (DAC Countries)	4.22	0.91	4.65	1.16
Major multilateral donors	1.31	0.59	1.66	0.94
Total ODA	5.53	1.50	6.31	2.10

Note: The shares of multilateral aid to education and basic education are calculated using 'total ODA minus general budget support' and 'total education ODA' minus 'education, level unspecified'.

Source: See Chapter 4 in the full EFA Report

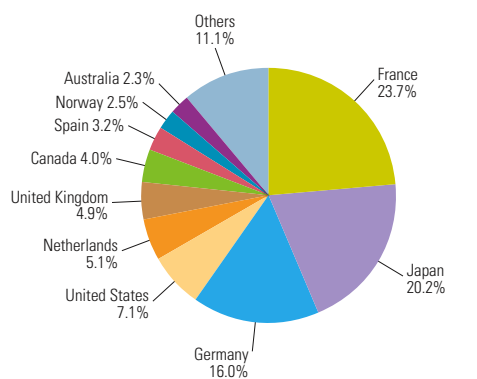
indicated that they would use about 40% of debt relief for the education sector. In a different approach, some Latin American governments are promoting debt swaps to directly finance education programmes. Argentina negotiated with Spain for the transfer of US\$100 million in lieu of debt payments, to help 215,000 students in some of the poorest parts of the country to complete lower secondary education.

For many donors, basic education is not a priority

Basic education is still not heavily favoured in bilateral aid flows, despite recent increases. On average, countries allocate 9.7% of their bilateral aid to education, the shares ranging from 2.8% (United States) to 35.7% (New Zealand). Overall, nearly 60% of bilateral commitments to education are still for the post-secondary level, twice what is allocated to basic education. Basic education's share of total education aid averaged 28.3%, with shares ranging from 1.4% (Italy) to 66.6% (Denmark), 67.4% (United States), 78.4% (Netherlands) and 88.6% (United Kingdom).

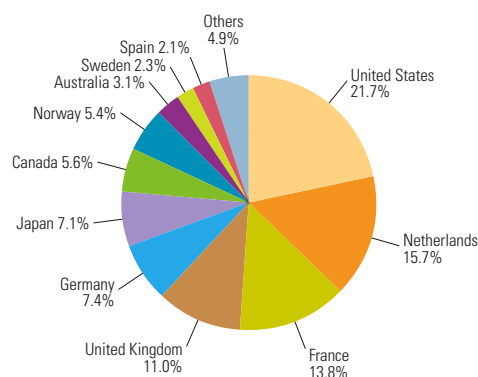
Figures 5.2 and 5.3 indicate the relative priorities accorded to education and to basic education as a share of total bilateral aid to the two levels by member countries of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC). From 1999 to 2003, France, Japan and Germany accounted for almost 60% of total bilateral aid to education, while the United States, the Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom accounted for 62% of bilateral aid to basic education. Only Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States allocated an average of over 60% of their education aid to basic education between 1999 and 2003. Some large donors, such as France, are restructuring aid programmes to further the Millennium Development Goals and are shifting more resources to basic education.

Figure 5.2: Contributions of individual DAC countries to total bilateral aid for education, 1999–2003



Notes: 'Others' are Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy, Ireland, New Zealand, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland. These countries contributed less than 2% each of total bilateral aid to education. Comparable data are not available for Luxembourg. Source: See Chapter 4 in the full EFA Report.

Figure 5.3: Contributions of individual DAC countries to total bilateral aid for basic education, 1999–2003



Notes: 'Others' are Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Italy, New Zealand, Portugal and Switzerland. These countries contributed less than 2% each to total bilateral aid to basic education. Comparable data are not available for Luxembourg, Greece and Ireland. Source: See Chapter 4 in the full EFA Report.

The regional distribution of bilateral aid reflects historical and political factors as well as general aid policy. Countries with the lowest Education Development Index are not necessarily accorded priority. Disproportionate volumes of bilateral aid go to middle-income countries with relatively good social indicators, including primary school enrolment. Nine countries allocate over 40% of their aid to sub-Saharan Africa. Australia, New Zealand and Japan give priority to East Asia and the Pacific. Strikingly, only Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom give more than 20% of their aid to South and West Asia, the region facing the largest EFA challenge in terms of numbers of people; sixteen donors allocate less than 10% of their education aid to this region.

Literacy: an instrument for reaching other ends

Literacy is not high on the agenda of most international agencies, beyond strong support for the achievement of UPE. Few bilateral donors and development banks make explicit reference to literacy in their aid policies. Most refer to literacy as an instrument for reaching other ends. Literacy in the fight to eradicate poverty receives attention (e.g. from the European Commission, Norway and New Zealand). Most agencies endorse EFA without explicit reference to literacy, although some see it as a principal goal of good schooling (e.g. Canada, the European Commission and the United Kingdom) or as a skill at the heart of basic education (e.g. Sweden and the United States). Japan emphasizes the importance of literacy in advancing development projects.

How these statements translate into funding allocations is difficult to assess. Data on aid for adult literacy programmes tend to fall in the 'basic skills for youth and adults' category in the OECD-DAC donor database. Very few agencies have disbursement data on literacy, and those that do generally qualify the data's accuracy.

There is a strong case for a new international dialogue on literacy, including its place in agency policies and in bilateral and multilateral discussions with governments.

Increasing aid's potential

While financing education is the primary responsibility of national governments, the world's poorest countries require predictable, long-term aid to carry through essential policy reforms. Such aid is particularly crucial to meet recurrent costs – salaries, textbooks, learning material and day-to-day administrative expenses – in countries with insufficient revenue to finance the steps necessary to achieve EFA. Aid can support

Disproportionate volumes of bilateral aid go to middle-income countries with relatively good social indicators, including primary school enrolment

governments in financing the cost of abolishing school fees – an essential move for achieving UPE. It can promote more equitable budget allocations to basic education and finance the professional development of teachers, large numbers of whom need to be recruited if EFA is to be achieved by 2015. The argument that aid should be deferred in countries that cannot cope with an influx of additional money does not advance education's cause. A more constructive approach would be to ensure that aid helps raise countries' capacity for managing the necessary education reforms.

To be effective, aid must be better coordinated, as previous Reports have consistently argued. A further positive step was taken in 2005 when over 100 countries endorsed the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Designed to reform the ways in which aid is delivered and managed, the declaration emphasizes the need to better align aid with national development strategies, to harmonize donor practices and to put a stronger focus on managing for results. In the field of education, the endeavour to provide more and better aid is reflected in the work of the Fast Track Initiative (FTI), including its close collaboration with the DAC. While the FTI is an important example of donor harmonization, it has not yet mobilized significant additional resources for EFA (Box 5.1).

Donors are experimenting with other approaches to make their aid more effective: silent partnerships are a case in point. Relatively recent in education, these occur when a country channels funds through another bilateral agency. This lessens the burden of aid procedures and entails no staff costs for the 'silent partner'. In Malawi, for example, the Netherlands channels funds through the United Kingdom's Department for International Development to support the country's education sector plan. Canada, France, Norway and Sweden are exploring similar partnerships in several sub-Saharan African countries.

Investing in skills

Technical assistance is a vital part of aid. It helps strengthen the knowledge and skills of those responsible for managing education sector reforms. It may apply to such fields as teacher training, textbook and curriculum development, school management and the decentralization of education provision. Although one-quarter of bilateral aid to African countries is channelled into capacity-building, the track record

Box 5.1 Fast Track Initiative: strong endorsement, low funding pledges

Established in 2002 to accelerate progress towards universal completion of primary education by 2015, the Fast Track Initiative is a global partnership between developing and developed countries. It is a direct response to the promise made in Dakar that 'no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources.' The FTI is built on mutual accountability. Donors are called upon to increase support in a predictable manner, coordinate support around one education plan and harmonize procedures. Partner countries agree to develop sound education sector programmes through broad-based consultation, demonstrate results on key performance indicators and exercise leadership in implementing the programme. The FTI is now open to all low-income countries. By mid-2005, thirteen countries had had their education plans endorsed and were receiving support from the FTI. In 2005, the United Nations Millennium Project, the United Kingdom's Commission for Africa and the G8 summit's G8 Communiqué gave strong endorsement to the initiative.

Although the FTI has emerged as a key coordinating mechanism for some thirty bilateral and multilateral agencies working in education, it has not resulted in a significant increase in aid. Six donors have pledged a total of US\$292 million to the FTI Catalytic Fund for 2003–2007. The fund was established to provide short-term support to help close the financing gap for countries with too few donors. Only US\$7.5 million has been disbursed, out of US\$98 million pledged for 2003–2005. The Education Programme Development Fund, aimed at countries without education plans, has attracted US\$6 million. This modest level of financing makes very limited direct inroads into the EFA funding deficit.

of technical cooperation is not strong. Efforts to harmonize aid should systematically include attention to technical assistance and cooperation, particularly at the country level, where the proliferation of sources of expertise continues. Recent studies point to the value of pooling technical assistance funds, a practice that remains all too rare. A premium should be placed on improving the knowledge base and sharing knowledge among countries with comparable problems. A more forceful international debate on how to better coordinate technical assistance in education is needed.

In closing

Only ten years are left to achieve the EFA goals. There has been positive change since Dakar towards UPE and gender parity at primary level, especially in the poorest countries. Public finance for education as a share of GNP is rising in a majority of countries and aid to basic education is increasing, although it still represents only 2.6% of total aid.

Yet the needs remain enormous at all levels of education, formal and non-formal. Literacy, as this Report argues, must become a cross-cutting political

priority at the core of Education for All. If direct measures were used to assess literacy skills, the number of adults with weak or no skills would climb well above the already staggering figure of 771 million as conventionally measured. This situation constitutes a severe violation of rights and a brake on all aspects of development.

The United Nations Literacy Decade is a call to put literacy – especially adult literacy – on everyone's agenda. This is beginning to happen, but is very far from being universal. In recent years, several countries – among them Brazil, Burkina Faso, Indonesia, Morocco, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Senegal and Venezuela – have devoted increasing attention to adult literacy, joining those, such as Bangladesh, China and India, that are achieving impressive results as the result of efforts during the 1990s.

Political commitment to a rights agenda focused on improving the quality of life of every citizen is a starting point for framing explicit national policies on literacy at all levels of education, with special emphasis on the most disadvantaged groups of children, youth and adults. Such policies must be underpinned by the vision of dynamic literate societies that encourage individuals to acquire literacy skills and to use them over time.

Literacy typically receives a mere 1% of national education budgets, a share that must rise if the Dakar literacy goal is to be achieved

The 2005 gender parity goal has been missed, but now is the time to build on progress made, and reaffirm the commitment to it and to all the EFA goals by paying particular attention to issues of access (abolishing school fees), quality (better training for more teachers) and the learning environment (safe schools, books for students, school health initiatives and adult programmes adapted to adult learners' needs). The powerful connections between parental education and children's schooling further reinforce the imperative to make adult literacy a priority in developed and developing nations.

For commitments to be met, public funding for basic education must continue to increase and be allocated more efficiently, with particular attention to equity. Literacy typically receives a mere 1% of national education budgets, a share that must rise if the Dakar literacy goal is to be achieved, if governments are to meet their public policy and financial responsibilities, and if literacy educators are to be professionalized and salaried.

Donors must honour their Dakar pledges. Assuming that the share of funding that goes to basic education remains constant, the increased overall aid flows pledged at the G8 summit could by 2010 result in an annual total of only US\$3.3 billion for basic education. This is still far short of the US\$7 billion a year estimated as necessary to achieve UPE and gender parity alone, without any allowance for adult literacy or ECCE. A doubling of aid to basic education beyond that currently anticipated would bring the international community closer to meeting its commitments and to achieving the EFA goals for 2015. It is vital that the case be made strongly for EFA in the follow-up to the G8 decisions and the outcomes of the September 2005 United Nations World Summit. This aid must go to countries with the gravest basic education challenges and be better coordinated so that it makes a tangible difference. The groundswell of support for halving the number of people living in extreme poverty in the next decade must translate into long-term commitments that recognize the indispensable role that education – with literacy at its core – plays in bettering the lives of individuals, their communities and nations. ■

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