

Education for All Goals

1. Expand early childhood care and education
2. Provide free and compulsory primary education for all
3. Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults
4. Increase adult literacy by 50 per cent
5. Achieve gender parity by 2005, gender equality by 2015
6. Improve the quality of education

Goal 1 – Expand Early Childhood Care and Education

How was the world when you were four? Large, scary, misunderstood? During the most formative years of a child's life, Early Childhood Care and education (ECCE) is vital to giving him or her a positive image of themselves and the world around them. It puts the world within their tiny reach and provides the grounding to express themselves creatively and socially.

ECCE is the first rock a child grapples onto from a turbulent sea of large looming objects and minute by minute existence. It can take many forms from nursery school and kindergarten to supervised care at home. Children attending ECCE are conclusively proven to perform better in school later on, yet across the globe ECCE programs are consistently given low priority, especially in developing countries.

Goal 2 – Universal Primary Education

Free and compulsory quality education for every young child of primary going age by 2015. A Primary education allows a human being to master the basics of the world around them. It allows them to read and write and learn about the modern dangers of HIV and infectious disease. It puts girls on an equal footing with boys, allows children to rationalise the actions of their peers and take full advantage of the opportunities that life has to offer.

Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015 is an achievable target by many accounts and perhaps the most talked about goal of them all. However progress in many countries remains slow and at current rates of enrolment, many countries will not achieve it. Worldwide, 77 million children are out of school and working. Many more drop out and of those who complete school; millions are unable to read a simple text.

Tremendous progress has been made towards UPE but the road remains a difficult one and it's up to Governments to smooth the way for those most in need. The usual crew of uneducated persons includes girls, minorities and the remote rural poor. Girls are still valued less than boys, minorities suffer language disparities and the rural poor endure major difficulties with school access and teacher absenteeism.

Goal 3 - Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults

The development of a person is a complicated thing. One that instruction cannot accomplish alone. To give a child knowledge is one thing but teaching them how to use it wisely is quite another.

Life skills are the abilities and skills a child will need throughout his life to accomplish his full potential. They refer to how a child thinks and rationalises, communicates and influences others. We can classify life skills four ways: learning to know; learning to be; learning to live together and learning to do. Such skills are important to take what we've learnt in school and adapt quickly in a rapidly changing world.

Life skills such as critical thinking and self-esteem are hard to measure and depend upon how students are taught by the teacher, the curriculum and the schools learning environment. Goal 3 is important to all the EFA goals because it forms the basis to develop a child's behaviour and can only be assessed by experienced teachers who understand the personalities in their class.

Goal 4 - Increase adult literacy by 50 per cent

There are 781million adults in the world who cannot read or write, two thirds of whom are women. Goal 4 calls for a 50% reduction in the number of world wide adult illiterates present in the year 2000.

The benefits of achieving literacy are great but the question adults need to answer first is why? Why should a farmer in a Ugandan village learn to read when there are no signs or advertised goods to buy in his community?

Governments need to develop programs that answer this question. This may be as part of a health education program, HIV avoidance, agricultural scheme or micro-finance loan. Of course people cannot be taught skills forever and must be able to learn on their own, which is perhaps the greatest benefit to literacy. Literacy may be key to their own survival.

Goal 5 - Achieve gender parity by 2005, gender equality by 2015

Gender parity refers to an equal number of boys and girls enrolled in school by 2005. Gender equality in education demands that girls be given the same access to quality education as boys as well as to equal benefits from it by 2015.

Although there is international consensus that men and women should be treated equally, the reverse is usually true. Across the globe there are more boys in school than girls and more male graduates than female. Girls who actually make it to school often drop out early on to marry or look after younger siblings. Truth be told, boys are just valued higher.

Educated girls make educated mothers and educated mothers are far more likely to send their children to school. Educating girls allows them to question societal values around them and makes them aware of their legal rights. Education is key to an equal society and goal 5 aims to achieve that.

Goal 6 - Improve the quality of education

This is a hard goal to measure and yet the most pressing issue for countries nearing basic Education for All. Around the world many governments are racing to achieve universal basic education (UBE) but almost always at the expense of quantity over quality. Universally, pupils suffer from teacher absenteeism, archaic teaching styles, worn out school buildings and few available resources.

Students must be pushed to achieve excellence yet this is misnomer for most of the developing world. Low quality education is typified by high drop-out rates and low enrolments. Strong inputs equal strong outputs. It isn't enough to simply build a school and hope students attend. Governments need to backup their education systems with a strong curriculum, quality teacher training and good school facilities if they are to succeed in EFA.

Typical low quality curriculums stress rote learning over activity based exercises. What use is knowledge if a child doesn't have the mind-set to use it? What use is attending a school system unable to teach you the skills needed to adapt to a highly competitive adult world? We learn best by actively using the knowledge we receive. Increased quality means better trained teachers, child-centred curriculums and facilities to stimulate young minds. Increased quality equals a child's increased ability to socialise, react and continue to learn in the future.

“True education is that which helps us to know the atman (the spirit), our true self, God and Truth.”

Mahatma Gandhi, 10th July, 1932

Relevant Reading:

Education for All Goals

http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=42579&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

An overview and links of all six internationally-agreed education goals aimed to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015.

Education for All and the World Bank

<http://www.worldbank.org/education/efa>

As a major donor to the EFA program the World Bank has a vested interest to see its investment pay off. The website is a portal of sorts to WB reports, progress indicators and articles.

Education for All in India

<http://educationforallinindia.com/>

A wide selection of news and information on EFA progress in India including detailed data interpreted from the Indian Census 2001. India aims to achieve Universal Elementary Education for 6-14 years by 2010.

EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007

http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49591&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

How can we tell if EFA is on track? With time to spare you'll all the progress data you'll need. The report contains detailed analysis on the EFA champions and losers with extensive country report tables covering 203 countries.