

# World Education

*An education for every human being on planet Earth? With only seven years until the 2015 deadline, we look at the state of education worldwide.*

## **Why Education?**

In the developing world, a child has a 4 in 10 chance of being born into extreme poverty. Does he or she have a future? If she does, where will it come from?<sup>1</sup>

Around the world 1 billion people live on a sum of less than US\$1 per day, 2.5 billion on less than US\$2 a day.<sup>2</sup> Their lives without mercy. The facts simply endless.

In our world of 6.4 billion people, an education is the right to a choice. A choice in the direction that any man or woman should wish to take. A choice to shrug off the cloak of poverty and create meaning in one's life.

An education is the seed from which a solution to world poverty can grow; a single lack of political commitment being the sole obstacle holding it back.

At the turn of the Millennium, 163 nations out of 192 UN members and 193 countries worldwide, signed the Education for All (EFA) charter.<sup>3</sup> Each shared a dream. A dream that by the year 2015, every child would have access to universal education and every adult would have a choice. This is the story of their progress.

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

## **Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2005**

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### **Global Literacy**

There's a good reason why the United Nations puts so much emphasis on world literacy, for without it none of the EFA goals can be achieved. Literacy is key not only to education, but also to an individual's capacity for critical thinking, improved health and family planning. It is the bedrock on which everything is taught and everything else made possible, and one of the first skills taught to children in school. Consider.

When a child needs to write, when a farmer needs to read, when a job application needs filling out, literacy is needed. When education needs reform, when healthcare needs improving, when action needs taking against the politics of injustice, people need the ability to read and write and think. Yet continually, this is a right denied.

Across the globe, 781 million people are unable to scan a page or put pen to paper, and thus lack the basic skills to gain any further education or improve their lives beyond

poverty. In Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Arabian states, illiterates from up to 40 percent of the population and the figures in India, Pakistan and China alone top 400 million – 52 percent of the world’s total.<sup>4</sup>

Of the limited progress made since 1990, world literacy rates have risen from 75 to 82 percent. But it should be higher. Low global political commitment and under-investment are excruciatingly low. At current rates of progress the world will see a decrease of only 100 million adult literates by 2015, nowhere near its EFA target of half the world’s total.

In 2006, a UN report declared that literacy programmes receive only one percent of education budgets and require an additional US\$2.5 billion every year until 2015 to achieve EFA goal four.<sup>5</sup> To attain literacy the average adult needs between 400-600 hours of training, spread over two years, but acute lack of investment mean that many programmes never even begin, let alone have the chance to finish.<sup>6</sup>

Literacy rates for the Youth demographic (15-24) fare slightly better, as they reflect students who have graduated in the last ten years and the current push towards universal enrollments. From 1990 to 2004, 18 million illiterate youths learnt to read and write as literacy rose from 82 to 87 percent. However, this is but a drop in a pool of 139 million worldwide (2004) and though increasing enrollments are preventing new illiterates from forming, little attention is being paid to existing ones.

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*“globally, a staggering one in five adults remain without basic literacy skills”*

### **Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007**

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#### **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)**

ECCE means all education in formal, private or non-formal settings, before a child’s primary education begins. Usually from age 3 onwards, ECCE supports a child’s performance in early grades, builds up confidence and social skills as well as helping provide parental support and healthcare training.

Not only does it encourage and boost a child on the road to academic success, it’s also designed to complement a child’s development at home. However, for Governments and donor agencies, early education is simply *not* a funding priority, despite the necessity being enshrined in the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (1989).

In 2004, 124 million youngsters were enrolled in ECCE classes, with a gross enrollment rate of 37 percent, up from 33 percent globally in 1999. Whilst expanding enrollment figures show progress towards EFA Goal 1, in cases like Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia figures show that 2 out of 3 children don’t attend ECCE, and in the case of China the numbers are actually falling.<sup>7</sup>

## **Enrollments in School**

EFA Goal 2 announces “provide free and compulsory universal primary education by 2015.” So where does the world stand?

The good news first. 47 out of 163 countries with data have achieved Universal Primary Education (UPE) worldwide and twenty more are on track to achieve it. From 1999 to 2005, global average primary enrollments increased from 85 to 89 percent,<sup>8</sup> with huge increases of 27 and 19 percent alone in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia respectively in only five years.

Despite encouraging progress, 11 percent (or 85 million) of the world’s children are still out of [primary] school and the number that dropout before completing 5 years education is at 20 percent, the majority being girls.<sup>9</sup> Due to late starts, 1 in every 5 children in primary school is of secondary school age and the older they begin, the less likely they will ever complete 9 years of schooling.

Owing to a lack of resources, and in the push to meet UPE, many countries are investing more in primary schooling than in secondary, causing secondary enrollments to suffer. Gross enrollment in Secondary school was only 67 percent in 2004, (58 percent NER). A distinct lack of school secondary schools in countries like Pakistan means enrollment is a dire 27 percent nationwide, and the lack of further education opportunities often means parents may not even enroll their kids in school at all.<sup>10</sup>

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*“In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, more children of secondary school age are attending primary school than secondary school.”*

### **The Millennium Development Goals Report 2007, United Nations**

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## **Girls in Education**

Where gender parity means equal access and gender equality means equal treatment, EFA Goal 5 calls to “achieve gender parity by 2005, gender equality by 2015.” If only it was so easy?

Out of 181 countries with available data around the world, only two thirds had achieved gender parity in primary education in 2004. Whereas, at the secondary level, out of 177 nations around a third had achieved in sexual equality, with disparities as equally in favour of girls as well as boys.

Worldwide, approximately two-thirds of all illiterates are women and the opportunities for girls in school don’t come easily. On average, 80 percent of all girls are enrolled in primary school with less than two thirds bothering in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Secondary school the situation is often far worse (higher costs, less facilities etc...).

In Pakistan, less than 60 percent of all girls begin primary school and less than 1 in 5 attend secondary. In India only 1 in 4 girls completes Grade 10.<sup>11</sup> Throughout much of the developing world, boys are seen as better able to look after elderly parents than girls, which means they often receive priority in schooling. Poverty, distance to school, tradition and early marriage all play a huge role in a girl's future, especially as she gets older.

It's been well documented that educating girls, provides more benefits to a country's economy than it does for boys. Educating girls, mean that mothers have smaller families, family healthcare improves and children perform better in class. Educating girls, increases a woman's rights, prevents abuse and unleashes the economic potential of half a nation's population.

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*“no country seriously committed to basic education will be thwarted in the achievement of this goal by lack of resources.”*

**World Education Forum – Dakar, Senegal (2000)**

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### **Quality in Education**

A quality education identifies how well a child learns as well as his or her development as an individual. It relates directly to the value a child sees in the schooling she receives, and the opinion of the local community. A quality education system always attracts more students than it repels, yet providing such a service remains the number one challenge facing the developing world today and the outcome of EFA Goal 6.

Poorly built and non-existent schools, few facilities, unqualified or absent teachers and curriculums that hold little or no value for local students contribute to low attendance and sky high dropout rates in many developing countries. Recent studies from select countries in Africa and Latin America showed that less than one third of all students achieved mastery of their subjects on graduation and it's not hard to see why.<sup>12</sup>

Too many Governments place far too much emphasis on enrollments in schools without stopping to consider how to educate them once there. Report after report talks about the short shrift given to educational quality in national schools, and yet few Governments commit to tackle the problem and matters are steadily getting worse.

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*“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”*

**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

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### *Out of School, Dropouts and Repeaters*

Depending on your source, up to 100 million children are out of school today with little chance of ever returning – and that’s only at primary level.<sup>13</sup> Throughout millions of primary schools, 20 percent of children dropout before the final grade. In 41 out of 133 countries worldwide, fewer than two thirds of primary students hear the last school bell.<sup>14</sup> The average worldwide repetition rate was under 5 percent in 2004.

What are the reasons? Whilst school fees and poverty play an obvious role in dropouts, less known reasons are the kids desire to dropout themselves. In rural Pakistan, almost a third of all boys in a 2001 survey actually asked their parents to be pulled out of school. Other factors also come into play.<sup>15</sup>

For girls, reasons for non-attendance include distance to school, local tradition and cost. Where poverty bites hard into family budgets, girls often play second fiddle to a boy’s education as that is all the family can afford. For minority students language also plays an important part, when students are unable to even understand the teacher, so once again fail to see the relevance in bothering to attend in the first place.

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*“Teachers, as this report repeatedly emphasizes, are the strongest influence on learning.”*

### **EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005**

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#### *Teachers*

The world currently needs an additional 18 million teachers if it is to achieve EFA by 2015<sup>16</sup> – between 2.4 and 4 million in Sub-Saharan Africa alone. In many countries teacher’s numbers would have to increase by up to 20 percent each year in order to achieve Universal Primary Enrollment.<sup>5</sup> However, for most Governments it may not be so much the numbers as the costs that need worrying about.

Public teacher salaries often absorb 90 percent of all education budgets in developing countries leaving little to invest in school infrastructure, textbooks and facilities. Against such constraints, many schools pass excess running costs onto local families in the form of school fees, that can form up a third of family budgets in China. A recent survey by the UN estimated that 89 of 103 nations were still collecting school fees from residents.<sup>5</sup>

However, for teachers it’s often not enough. Low wages, ramshackle schools and poor support and training, mean that 25 percent of teachers fail to show up to work in India, and it’s a trend common across the world.<sup>17</sup> Whilst the average global class size was 18 primary students per teacher in 2004, teachers in many countries face classes of up to 60, where new enrollments are spiraling out of control.

Under-qualification is also a major problem. The importance of teachers to a student's education can not be understated, yet in many countries, teachers have but the bare minimum of standards with which to take class. A recent survey in Southern Africa found that some primary mathematics teachers scored lower than students in the same tests.

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*“In the countries with the highest pupil/teacher ratios, barely one-third of students who start primary reach grade 5”*

## **EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005**

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### **Funding**

Where resources constantly compete for funding in developing budgets, education nearly always loses out. As countries continue to develop, competition for funding is increasing as other sectors like infrastructure and farming clamour for priority. But Governments fail to see that short-term investments in physical projects belie the huge long-term returns that an investment in people will bring.

The UN recommends that countries set aside 6 percent of their GDP on education, yet funding in Sub-Saharan Africa sits around 3.3 percent,<sup>18</sup> falling below 2 percent in Pakistan in 2004. Whilst spending in education has increased in general, it has fallen in 41 of 106 countries with data and as always, it's the people who lose out.<sup>19</sup>

An extra US\$11 billion a year is needed in additional funding to achieve the six EFA goals, and an extra \$50 billion to achieve the Millennium Goals, both by 2015.<sup>20</sup> The Millennium declaration promised that *“no country seriously committed to basic education will be thwarted for lack of resources,”* yet the world needs an additional US\$7 billion in funding, or a doubling of current aid, to see EFA a reality.

Total aid to basic education accounts for only 2.6 percent of all Foreign aid and its priority is unlikely to increase any time soon. Though the number of applicants per donor is rising year on year, world military spending is rapidly expanding, exceeding US1 trillion in 2005.<sup>21</sup>

Ultimately, however, the seed for education reform can only come from developing nations themselves, for only those genuinely committed will receive aid. No country wishes to remain attached to an aid lifeline for ever, and for the world's poor, an education offers the best chance of taking control of their lives and doing just that.

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*“Take away my people, but leave my factories, and soon grass will grow on the factory floors. Take away my factories, but leave my people, and soon we will have a new and better factory.”*

**Andrew Carnegie**

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## **Conclusion**

There is no right and wrong way to go about solving these problems in education, but higher political commitment and increased funding are certainly at the fore and even if Governments aren't willing, the public may well be.

Private school attendance is soaring throughout the world as parents seek alternative options to decrepit public education systems, unable to keep bums in class. In Pakistan, for example, 42 percent of all children in school attend private education, and the Government is actively promoting the medium as a way to universalize education for all.<sup>22</sup>

Enrollment may be a problem easy to solve, but a quality education is certainly not and long-term financing even less. In the long-run indications show that most countries are unlikely to make EFA a reality by 2015, but at least most are now on track.

Though we may not see it now, we are living through a period that has already seen millions lifted from extreme poverty and the beginning of a concerted push to educate mankind. Global monitoring, aid and expertise have greatly increased as a result of EFA and the Millennium goals. Rhetoric continues to exist, but action is increasing also as Education plans and poverty schemes swing into effect.

Now is not the time for pessimism. Now is the time for hope, not malice. The reality of much of the world is shocking to read and even worst to experience, yet dreams are made reality through seeing them happen, not brushing them aside as a lost cause. Goals like EFA, mark an unprecedented point in human history, and for the sake of millions of children around the world, I hope that Governments continue to think the same.

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*“The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problems.”*

**Mahatma Gandhi**

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**Update:** The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008 was recently launched in December 2007, just after this article was completed. The new report continues the themes of 2007, and figures seem about the same with EFA data current up to 2005. EFA 2008 reports on progress towards the 2015 EFA target and can be downloaded online from the site below. <http://www.efareport.unesco.org/>

## References

1. Source: State of the World's Children 2001 – UNICEF  
<http://www.unicef.org/sowc01/2-3.htm>
2. Poverty at a Glance – World Bank 2004  
<http://go.worldbank.org/ZLXDG0KKS0>  
**Note:** A revision made by the World Bank in 2005 to its Purchasing Power Calculations, mean that new global poverty figures released in 2008 are likely to be much more accurate than preceding estimates. New releases for China, from the Asian Development Bank, put the number of people living on less than US\$1 per day at 300 million.
3. According to the below source there are 192 UN member nations and 193 sovereign states in the world currently recognised by the majority.  
<http://www.worldatlas.com/nations.htm>
4. According to EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007 statistics tables, the three countries have: India (268 million), Pakistan (49 million) and China (87 million). Total number of illiterates is 404 million or 52 percent of a global 781 million. 75 percent of the world's illiterates live in only 12 countries worldwide.  
[http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=43140&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=43140&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)
5. Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005 – Stats Summary  
[http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=43140&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=43140&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)
6. Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005 – Part IV - Good policy, good practice - meeting the literacy challenge  
[http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=43078&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=43078&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)
7. In East Asia, pre-primary enrollments fell almost 10 percent between 1990 and 2004, mainly as a result of declines in China, which decreased from 124 to 120 million over the same period. Possible reasons are a rapidly declining birth rate, and an increase in funding to other sectors of the economy such as infrastructure and irrigation – that has recently caused China's illiterate rate to sore to 104 million. See EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007.
8. Source: Millennium Development Goals mid-decade education Progress Report – UNESCO, (July 2007)  
[http://www.uis.unesco.org/template/pdf/EducGeneral/MDG\\_2007Goal%202-3.pdf](http://www.uis.unesco.org/template/pdf/EducGeneral/MDG_2007Goal%202-3.pdf)
9. Many factors affect the number of school dropouts including, level of mother's education, boredom in class, rural poverty, gender and tradition. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007, "In 2004 the number of children entering the last grade of primary school as a percentage of the population at the official age for that grade was 86% worldwide, almost 99% in developed countries and 84% in developing ones."
10. See [http://www.r4e.org/Education\\_in\\_Pakistan](http://www.r4e.org/Education_in_Pakistan)
11. Source: Selected Education Statistics (2000-2001)  
[http://www.azimpremjifoundation.org/downloads/edustats\\_03.pdf](http://www.azimpremjifoundation.org/downloads/edustats_03.pdf)

Compulsory Basic Education calculated up to class 8 has a 57.7 percent drop-out rate for girls and 71.5 percent drop-out rate up to class 10.

12. Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005 – Chapter 6  
[http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=38274&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=38274&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)
13. According to the EFA 2007 report, 72 million children were out of school in 2007. Ask UNICEF and the figure is 93 million. Figures are always subjective, so as a guide 100 million is a better figure for now. UNICEF figures include Household data which include attendance as well as enrollment data whilst, UIS results rely purely on enrollment data supplied by Governments.  
[http://www.unicef.org/progressforchildren/2007n6/index\\_41796.htm](http://www.unicef.org/progressforchildren/2007n6/index_41796.htm)  
**Note:** Between 1999 and 2004, out-of-school children enrollment numbers dropped from 98 to 77 million as a result of a readjustment of figures in India. Meanwhile, third party surveys in India, cast doubt on the alteration.
14. “fewer than two-thirds of primary school pupils reach the last grade in 41 countries (out of 133 with data).”  
[http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=43140&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=43140&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)
15. Source: Pakistan Integrated Household Survey (2000-01), Table 2.26  
[www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/fbs/statistics/pihs2000-2001/pihs2000-2001.html](http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/fbs/statistics/pihs2000-2001/pihs2000-2001.html)
16. Source: Oxfam Press Release for Global School Report 2008: No Excuses! (11<sup>th</sup> December 2007)  
[http://www.oxfam.org/en/news/2007/pr071211\\_global\\_campaign\\_for\\_education\\_school\\_report\\_2008](http://www.oxfam.org/en/news/2007/pr071211_global_campaign_for_education_school_report_2008)  
**Also See:** [http://www.campaignforeducation.org/schoolreport/2008\\_reports/](http://www.campaignforeducation.org/schoolreport/2008_reports/)
17. Source: Newsweek article entitled “Education a Learning Curve” -  
<http://www.newsweek.com/id/46822>
18. Source: EFA Global Monitoring Summary Report 2005, p19
19. Source: EFA Global Monitoring Summary Report 2007, p3  
<http://www.efareport.unesco.org/>
20. Source: The cost of attaining the Millennium Goals – World Bank  
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22. Source: The State of Education in Pakistan (2003-4), p28  
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## General Sources

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<http://www.efareport.unesco.org/> (2007)