

A Time for Action: Placing Education at the Core of Development

by

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No country has succeeded without educating its people; education is key to sustaining growth and reducing poverty.

Everywhere I go I see the power of education to improve people's lives. We have ample evidence to demonstrate that broad-based education is associated with a wide range of indicators of well being, including a nation's increased productivity and competitiveness as well as social and political progress. South Korea, Malaysia, Mexico among others have taught us this. Most important, education is a basic human right that frees the spirit from the chains of ignorance.

The World Bank is firmly committed to achieving the goal of Education for All.

The Bank has fulfilled its EFA commitments made in Jomtien in 1990, and subsequently in Beijing in 1995. We have doubled our lending for education from \$918.7 million to an average of \$1.9 billion a year. We have increased the percentage of our lending devoted to basic education, from 27 to 44 percent. We have set up a program to target 31 countries (with populations over 4 million) where the gender gap is greatest, and have increased lending for girls' education to an average of \$860 million per year. Our support combined with that of other agencies and governments themselves has helped produce significant progress in raising the number of children in school (especially girls) in many countries. The total number of children in primary school increased from around 600 million to about 700 million. In many countries, there are now comprehensive education policies and programs in place. Strong partnerships in education have been established. ADEA, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, is a good example of such partnership.

We have come a long way on EFA, but we still have a long way to go.

Too many people are still excluded from education because of poverty, poor policies and corruption. 125 million children are still out of school, and nearly 1 billion are illiterate - the majority girls and women. Education attainment in perhaps half the sub-Saharan countries, and several of the South Asian countries, is well below the level required historically to achieve sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction.

Why has progress been so slow?

We underestimated how difficult and expensive the process of achieving EFA is, how long it takes to bring about change. And then we had a series of unexpected challenges that arose during the '90s - economic crises, political and economic transitions, the devastation of HIV/AIDS, the widening of the digital divide, civil conflicts and natural disasters. In addition, rapid population growth made the achievement of the EFA goals more difficult.

Yet the EFA goals are attainable.

Over the last 10 years since the Jomtien conference there have been some real successes. Some examples of where progress has been made are the Fundescola programs in Brazil, the Education Enhancement programs in Egypt, the Universal Primary Education program in Uganda, the expenditure reform program in Mauritania, and the District Primary Education Program in India.

We've learned some key lessons about what is required to achieve EFA.

Strong political commitment is the cornerstone of success, to promote efficient resource utilization, sustained support for difficult and sometimes contentious policies, and build the necessary institutional capacity. Education policy is most effective when it is developed in the context of a comprehensive sector policy framework. We must pay attention to core education finance issues to ensure that available resources are being used efficiently. Safety nets allowing kids to stay in school are important during crises. And perhaps most important, we have learned that quality is as important as quantity - simple access is not enough. We must have in place the essential basics: dedicated and well-trained teachers, support for their salaries and teaching resources, and an overall environment conducive to learning. And we now have unprecedented opportunities to harness information technology for teacher training and increased access and quality.

SO HOW DO WE MOVE FORWARD?

I see the following areas for immediate action:

First, we must place education squarely at the core of the global and national development agenda.

Education must be higher on the agenda of everyone: governments, donor agencies, NGOs, trade unions, the private sector, foundation. Achieving quality education for all can no longer be the responsibility of Ministries of Education alone. I raised this issue in my note to the finance and development ministers at the recent spring meetings of our Development Committee in Washington. Next time we meet to review our progress on EFA, Ministers of Finance should also be here along with more Heads of State.

No country with a viable and sustainable plan for achieving Education for All will be unable to implement it for lack of external resources.

This is similar to the pledge I just made at our Spring Meetings in Washington on support for combatting HIV/AIDS. This is a huge challenge and will require effort from all of us. Whether money, people or know how, we will work with our partners to make it happen.

Country ownership and leadership is key to moving forward.

This is a core concept of the Comprehensive Development Framework. It is also the underpinning of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, which were adopted by the Boards of Governors of the World Bank and IMF in September as the basis for our future lending first to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs) and eventually to all our client countries. As you know, the HIPC Initiative aims at eliminating unsustainable debt in the world's poorest and most heavily indebted countries, and redirecting resources into the social sectors. Through the HIPC Initiative and the PRSPs we pledge to work with renewed vigor with governments and other donors to reach the EFA goals by integrating actions and outcomes across sectors and with macroeconomic policies, to ensure coordinated, coherent strategies.

Second, we need to provide fresh leadership for the way forward with a very different set of alliances.

The Bank, together with our UN agency partners, and bilateral development sponsors, have led the EFA process over the past 10 years and have contributed substantially to the ongoing activities. While this partnership is significant and important, it has not been sufficient to get us where we need to go. Success is hard won, achieved country by country, and requires the participation of other actors as well - governments, yes, but also civil society and the private sector. After Dakar, the EFA movement must move forward at the country, regional and global level. It must be broader, more inclusive, more innovative and more flexible than in the past.

Third, we must intensify our efforts by leveraging stronger partnerships on key interventions that we know make a difference.

- Improving girls' educational opportunities: As the Secretary General said yesterday, we too are committed to working with our UN partners to make notable progress in reducing gender disparities by 2005, and in 31 target countries.

- Addressing the scourge of HIV/AIDS: As we've seen in Uganda and Thailand, education makes an enormous difference in stopping the spread of this disease which is having such a deadly impact on social and economic well-being of millions. With our partners in UNAIDS, we have greatly expanded our support to combat HIV/AIDS especially in Africa. This was a topic for discussion at the Spring Meetings. The new partnership with WHO and UNICEF on FRESH (Focusing Resources on Effective School Health), which is being launched here in Dakar, will make HIV/AIDS an essential part of education programs - the President of Senegal and I will be signing a project to create the first of many such initiatives tomorrow.

•Bridging the digital divide: With programs such as WorLD Links for Development we are working with the private sector and NGOs to link more than 400 schools and 40,000 teachers and students in developing countries to their peers in industrialized ones. We also have in place the African Virtual University and the Global Distance Learning Network. The Global Development Gateway is our next venture at a truly global and innovative multi-sectoral partnership.

Here I also want to pay special tribute to the efforts of the NGOs involved in the Global Campaign for Education. They have played an important advocacy role. We fundamentally agree with their call that by the year 2015 free education be a right for all children up to age 15.

Of course we recognize that in order to help poor countries reach this goal in a sustainable way, we may have to be open in the interim to innovative ways of funding education, including community-based approaches. Clearly we have to work with governments to ensure that the poorest are not further disadvantaged in the process.

Finally, we need to put into place a fast-track action plan for countries that are committed to achieving EFA goals sooner than the 2015 timeline.

Under such a demand-driven process, we are saying that we as donors must be ready to respond more quickly and help countries when they are ready to move. The first group of countries in this fast-track process can forge the path for others by laying out details on how to reach EFA, removing barriers, establishing working partnerships and setting milestones for progress.

This is a plan on which we can all converge, and which should be adopted in the Forum's Framework for Action.

If we can agree on this - and I sincerely hope we can - then we must work together to develop a concrete plan for accelerating action during the next three months.

We need a truly global plan of action. This is a first step, but an essential one - to support those governments who are committed to achieving EFA goals. The time for action is now.