

Toward universal primary education: investments, incentives, and institutions

Lead authors
Nancy Birdsall, Coordinator
Ruth Levine
Amina Ibrahim, Coordinator

UN Millennium Project
Task Force on Education and Gender Equality
2005

EARTHSCAN
London • Sterling, Va.

**MillenniumProject**

First published by Earthscan in the UK and USA in 2005

Copyright © 2005
by the United Nations Development Programme
All rights reserved

ISBN: 1844072215 paperback

For a full list of publications please contact:

Earthscan
8–12 Camden High Street
London, NW1 0JH, UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 7387 8558
Fax: +44 (0)20 7387 8998
Email: earthinfo@earthscan.co.uk
Web: www.earthscan.co.uk
22883 Quicksilver Drive, Sterling, VA 20166-2012, USA

Earthscan is an imprint of James and James (Science Publishers) Ltd and publishes in association with the International Institute for Environment and Development

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record has been requested

This publication should be cited as: UN Millennium Project 2005. *Toward Universal Primary Education: Investments, Incentives, and Institutions*. Task Force on Education and Gender Equality.

Photos: Front cover Pedro Cote/UNDP; back cover, top to bottom, Christopher Dowswell, Pedro Cote/UNDP, Giacomo Pirozzi/Panos Pictures, Liba Taylor/Panos Pictures, Jørgen Schytte/UNDP, United Nations Photo Library, Giacomo Pirozzi/UNICEF, Curt Carnemark/World Bank, Pedro Cote/UNDP, Franck Charton/UNICEF, Paul Chesley/Getty Images, Ray Witlin/World Bank, Pete Turner/Getty Images.

This book was edited, designed, and produced by Communications Development Inc., Washington, D.C., and its UK design partner, Grundy & Northedge.

The Millennium Project was commissioned by the UN Secretary-General and sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme on behalf of the UN Development Group. The report is an independent publication that reflects the views of the members of the Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, who contributed in their personal capacity. This publication does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme, or their Member States.

Printed on elemental chlorine-free paper

Foreword

The world has an unprecedented opportunity to improve the lives of billions of people by adopting practical approaches to meeting the Millennium Development Goals. At the request of the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the UN Millennium Project has identified practical strategies to eradicate poverty by scaling up investments in infrastructure and human capital while promoting gender equality and environmental sustainability. These strategies are described in the UN Millennium Project's report *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals*, which was coauthored by the coordinators of the UN Millennium Project task forces.

The task forces have identified the interventions and policy measures needed to achieve each of the Goals. In *Toward Universal Primary Education: Investments, Incentives and Institutions*, the Task Force on Education and Gender Equality argues that education has the potential to transform societies and to fully realize human capabilities, to prepare workers to participate in the global economy, and to provide citizens with the tools for full engagement in public life—an emphasis that is echoed in *Investing in Development*. The report lays out a clear vision of what will be required to achieve universal primary education in the developing world—specific actions to increase access and demand for education in combination with difficult but feasible improvements in the institutions of the education sector.

Toward Universal Primary Education moves beyond the typical business as usual approach. It argues that bold recommendations are needed not only to expand education systems and increase spending, but also to encourage the key actors, including governments, civil society, and parents, to create the conditions for effective, egalitarian, quality education systems that succeed in bringing the hardest to reach children to school. To support these measures, the report strongly recommends that the international community live up to

commitments already made and increase those commitments as developing countries make progress.

This report was prepared by a group of leading experts who contributed in their personal capacity and volunteered their time to this important task. I am very grateful for their thorough and skilled efforts, and I am sure that the practical options for action in this report will make an important contribution to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. I strongly recommend this report to all who are interested in understanding the range of actions needed to translate the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education into reality.

Jeffrey D. Sachs
New York
January 17, 2005

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Task force members</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xii</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xiv</i>
<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>xvi</i>
<i>Millennium Development Goals</i>	<i>xviii</i>

Executive summary 1

Part 1 Setting the stage 17

Chapter 1 The task force's contribution 19

Task force methods	20
Audience and organization of the report	20
The contribution of the task force	21

Chapter 2 Education and society: multiple benefits, unrealized potential 23

Education is society's main instrument for reproducing itself and can be a key ingredient for social change	23
Education is an end in itself and has tremendous benefits for individuals and society	25
The benefits of education are conditioned by the context	27

Chapter 3 The Goals and the history of goal-setting in education 31

<i>Chapter 4 Trends in primary education and gender parity</i>	35
A host of factors affect enrollment and retention rates	36
Learning achievement needs to be measured	40
Conclusions and future prospects	41

Part 2 Education systems in developing countries: income, institutions, and incentives 43

<i>Chapter 5 Education systems in developing countries</i>	45
High-performing educational systems can achieve results even with limited resources	46
Countries with low-performing systems need to address a variety of governance problems	48
Conclusion	52

<i>Chapter 6 Strategies for creating more and better educational opportunities</i>	53
Strategy 1: get out-of-school children into school	53
Strategy 2: create better institutions, increase transparency, and provide better incentives	66

<i>Chapter 7 Financing the education Goals</i>	78
--	----

Part 3. Forging an international compact for education: roles and responsibilities of donors and developing countries 83

<i>Chapter 8 A global compact for basic education</i>	85
---	----

<i>Chapter 9 What donors should do</i>	88
Recommendation 1: support bold political leadership and provide firm financial commitments to make Education for All and the Fast Track Initiative work	88
Recommendation 2: reform the donor business	91
Recommendation 3: use a transparent accountability framework for reporting	91
Recommendation 4: invest in genuine evaluation	92

<i>Chapter 10 A call to action</i>	94
------------------------------------	----

Appendixes

Appendix 1. Commissioned papers for education report	97
Appendix 2. Summary of the civil society e-discussion on the education report of the Task Force on Education and Gender Equality	98

Appendix 3. Success stories in policy interventions toward high quality universal primary education	101
Appendix 4. Data issues	150
Appendix 5. Major initiatives that promote the Millennium Development Goals on education and gender equality	154
Appendix 6. Need for postprimary education	161

Notes 164

References 168

Boxes

1.1 How education affects achievement of the Millennium Development Goals	21
2.1 Educating girls yields broad benefits	26
2.2 Macroeconomic shocks have profound effects on education	29
6.1 Educating children can help slow the spread of HIV/AIDS	64
6.2 Parent involvement has produced remarkable results in Himachal Pradesh, India	72
7.1 Calculating the cost of providing universal primary education is tricky	79
9.1 The Fast Track Initiative has enormous potential, but problems have limited its effectiveness	90

Figures

3.1 Public spending on education has risen in the past 40 years, but it varies widely across regions	33
3.2 Bilateral official development assistance for education has risen, too	34
3.3 Gross primary enrollment ratios have remained fairly static since the 1980s	34
4.1 Primary net enrollment will need to increase dramatically in many regions if the Goal is to be met	40
4.2 In most regions, more rapid change will be necessary to achieve gender equality in primary education by 2015	41
5.1 Countries with higher per capita GDP tend to have higher primary enrollment rates	46
5.2 In low-income countries the relationship between per capita GDP and net primary enrollment rates is not simple	46

Tables

3.1 International goals for universal primary education, 1934–2002	32
3.2 International development goals for gender parity in education, 1960–2001	33

4.1 Primary completion rates, by region and gender, 1990 and 2000	36
4.2 Test results for selected developing countries	39
5.1 Household education expenditures as a share of monthly spending in five CIS countries	51
7.1 Bilateral and multilateral commitments to basic education, 2001–02	80
A5.1 Declarations affirming universal education and gender equality	154
A5.2 Civil society initiatives	155

Task force members

Task force coordinators

Nancy Birdsall, President, Center for Global Development, United States

Amina Ibrahim, National Coordinator, Education for All, Federal
Ministry of Education, Nigeria

Geeta Rao Gupta, President, International Center for Research on
Women, United States

Task force members

Charles Abani, Country Director, ActionAid International, Nigeria

Carmen Barroso, Regional Director, Western Hemisphere Region,
International Planned Parenthood Federation, United States

Barbara Bruns, Lead Economist, Human Development Network, World
Bank, United States

Mayra Buvinic, Chief, Social Development Division, Sustainable
Development Department, Inter-American Development Bank,
United States

Winnie Byanyima, Director, Women, Gender and Development,
African Union, Ethiopia

Jennifer Chiwela, Executive Director, People's Action Forum, Zambia

Christopher Colclough, Professor, Economics of Education, Director,
Centre for Commonwealth Education, University of Cambridge,
United Kingdom

Diane Elson, Professor, Global Social Change and Human Rights,
University of Essex, United Kingdom; Senior Scholar and Director,
Gender Equality and the Economy, Levy Economics Institute, Bard
College, United States

Tamara Fox, Program Officer, Population Program, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, United States

Carolyn Hannan, Director, Division for Advancement of Women, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United States

Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director, United Nations Development Fund for Women, United States

Ruth Kagia, Director, Education Network, World Bank, United States

Lin Lean Lim, Deputy Regional Director, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, International Labour Organization, Thailand

Nora Lustig, President, Universidad de las Américas, México

Karen Mason, Director, Gender and Development, World Bank, United States

Arlene Mitchell, Chief, School Feeding Service, Policy, Strategy and Program Support Division World Food Programme, Italy

Penina Mlama, Executive Director, Forum for African Women Educationalists, Kenya

Mary Joy Pigozzi, Director, Division for the Promotion of Quality Education, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, France

Magaly Pineda, Founder and Coordinator, Centro de Investigación para la Acción Femenina, Dominican Republic

Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck, Director, Network Women's Program, Open Society Institute, United States

Paulo Renato Souza, President and Founder, Paulo Renato Souza Consultants, Brazil

Richard Sabot, Professor Emeritus, Economics, Williams College; Chairman of the Board and Cofounder, Eziba.com, United States

Gita Sen, Sir Ratan Tata Chair Professor, Indian Institute of Management, India; Founding Member, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era

Gorgui Sow, Coordinator, Education Specialist, Africa Network Campaign for Education for All, Senegal

Gene Sperling, Director, Center for Universal Education, Council on Foreign Relations, United States

Albert Tuijnman, Senior Economist, Human Capital, European Investment Bank, Luxembourg

Cream Wright, Chief, Education Section, United Nations Children's Fund, United States

Senior task force associates

Caren Grown, Director, Poverty Reduction and Economic Governance
Team, International Center for Research on Women, United States

Ruth Levine, Director of Programs and Senior Fellow, Center for Global
Development, United States

Preface

This report reflects almost two years of work by the members of the Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, an expert advisory group responding to a mandate of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The members of the task force include presidents and directors of nongovernmental organizations in India, Nigeria, Senegal, the United States, and Zambia; leaders of activist groups in the Dominican Republic and Kenya; scholars in Luxembourg, Mexico, Senegal, the United Kingdom, and the United States; parliamentary and government officials in Brazil, Nigeria, and Uganda; and senior staff and sectoral experts of the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Children’s Fund, United Nations Development Fund for Women, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, International Labour Organization, World Food Programme, Inter-American Development Bank, and World Bank.

The task force reviewed the enormous amount of material on education in low- and middle-income countries, drawing on academic and official sources. It also commissioned new work to explore special topics. Task force members visited Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, and Tajikistan, consulting widely with citizens, officials, and educators in these and other countries. Task force members also presented initial findings to UNESCO and to participants at meetings of the UNESCO–sponsored Education for All expert group. The full task force met four times to discuss findings and recommendations. Two subgroups focusing on education and gender equality met several times and benefited from an electronic consultation with civil society organizations to obtain feedback on an initial draft report.

The task force’s mandate was to identify strategies that low- and-middle income countries can adopt to achieve universal primary school completion and to make recommendations to the international community of donors on

how best to support countries in achieving that goal. In the spirit of providing a menu of options that must be tailored to meet local conditions, the report identifies critical interventions that have proven to be effective in different settings. It identifies the shortcomings of education systems in many developing countries and emphasizes the changes in institutional arrangements and incentives—for citizens, parents, students, teachers, and policymakers—that are critical if new investments and other interventions are to work.

The task force undertook its work with the recognition that the education sector both influences and is influenced by the broader social and political environment. The report thus emphasizes the need to adopt social and economic policies that stimulate demand for primary education: movement toward a skills-based economy, progress toward democracy, and public sector accountability to citizens. The report also identifies ways in which education—particularly the education of girls and other groups that have systematically been excluded—can profoundly transform societies.

For donors the task force has a simple message: fulfill commitments already made and deepen commitments to countries that are moving strongly toward more and better education for all. This message comes against a backdrop in which donors to education face a crisis of credibility, as the pledges made earlier have yet to be realized. In the view of the task force, there is little need for ever better-documented recommendations if simple promises are not kept.

* * *

The work of the task force reflects a consensus among its members. The arguments set out in this report may not necessarily reflect the individual approach or position of a particular agency or member.

Acknowledgments

The UN Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality gratefully acknowledges the many individuals, institutions, and communities that assisted it during this project. The Millennium Project Secretariat team, led by Jeffrey Sachs, provided excellent leadership and support. John McArthur and Chandrika Bahadur, in particular, provided tremendous assistance.

This report was prepared by a team led by Ruth Levine and Nancy Birdsall (both from the Center for Global Development) and including Kelly Tobin, Anne-Marie Smith, Maria Beatriz Orlando, and Prarthna Dayal. The team was advised by an expert panel of task force members who attended meetings, provided background materials, and offered comments and assistance. This panel included Charles Abani, Charles Barroso, Barbara Bruns (from July 2004), Mayra Buvinic, Winnie Byanyima, Jennifer Chiwela, Christopher Colclough, Diane Elson, Tamara Fox, Carolyn Hannan, Noeleen Heyzer, Ruth Kagia (through July 2004), Lin Lean Lim, Nora Lustig, Karen Mason, Arlene Mitchell, Penina Mlama, Mary Joy Pigozzi, Magaly Pineda, Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck, Paulo Renato Souza, Richard Sabot, Gita Sen, Gorgui Sow, Gene Sperling, Albert Tuijnman, and Cream Wright.

The report was edited and produced by Meta de Coquereaumont, Barbara Karni, Bruce Ross-Larson, Christopher Trott, and Elaine Wilson of Communications Development Incorporated.

The task force drew from the research and expertise of many institutions that are actively engaged in education-related issues. It thanks those who prepared background papers, wrote notes, made presentations at task force meetings, and provided valuable advice and comments: Rekha Balu, Rosemary Bellew, Claudio de Moura Castro, Michael Clemens, Luis Crouch, Simon Ellis, Caren Grown, Sabeen Hassanali, George Ingram, Anne Jellema, Ruth Kagia, Julie Kennedy, Kenneth King, John Lauglo, Denise Lievesley, Michael

Kremer, Kurt Moses, Karen Lashman, Maureen Lewis, Joan Lombardi, Samuel Morley, Lant Pritchett, Bob Prouty, Jeff Puryear, Clinton Robinson, Joanne Sandler, Noala Skinner, and Sheila Wamahiu.

Several institutions generously hosted or co-organized education task force meetings, events, and field visits. The task force would like to thank Abhimanyu Singh and Khawla Shaheen at UNESCO headquarters in Paris for generously hosting the task force at the Fifth Education for All working group meeting and allowing the task force members to convene their fourth meeting there. It thanks Gita Sen and colleagues at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, as well as the Movement for Alternatives and Youth Awareness, DC Scores, and the Forum for African Women Educationalists.

Finally, the task force thanks David Archer and Chike Anyanwu at ActionAid UK for facilitating the civil society e-discussion and Akanksha Marphatia for directing the consultation.

We are grateful for the comments and contributions from all. Remaining errors are the responsibility of the authors.

Abbreviations

ACE	Asociación Comunal para la Educación (Community Education Association) (El Salvador)
BESO	Basic Education Systems Overhaul (Ethiopia)
CDD	Center for Democracy and Development (Ghana)
CIET	Centro de Investigación de Enfermedades Tropicales (Tropical Disease Research Centre) (Mexico)
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CENAMEC	El Centro Nacional para el Mejoramiento de la Enseñanza de la Ciencia (National Center for the Enhancement of Science Teaching) (Venezuela)
COBET	Complementary Basic Education Program in Tanzania
COPE	Complementary Opportunities for Primary Education
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EDUCO	Educación con Participación de la Comunidad (Community-Managed Schools Program) (El Salvador)
EFA	Education for All
FONABE	Fondo Nacional de Becas (National Fund of Scholarships) (Costa Rica)
FRESH	Focusing Resources on Effective School Health and Nutrition
EPRD	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
GDP	gross domestic product
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IDA	International Development Association
ILO	International Labour Organization

IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
MAYA	Movement for Alternatives and Youth Awareness (India)
MISA	Minimum Income for School Attendance
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NEU	Nueva Escuela Unitaria (New Unitary School) (Guatemala)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
PACES	Plan de Ampliación de Cobertura de la Educación Secundaria (Plan for Increasing Secondary School Coverage) (Colombia)
PETI	Programme for the Eradication of Child Labour (Brazil)
PIDI	Programa Integral de Desarrollo Infantil (Integrated program for Infant Development) (Bolivia)
PREAL	El Programa de Promoción de la Reforma Educativa en América Latina y el Caribe (Chile)
PROHECO	Programa de Educación con Participación de la Comunidad (Community-Managed Education Program) (Honduras)
Progresá	Programa de Educación, Salud y Alimentación (Mexico)
SAR	Special Administrative Region
SIMCE	System for the Measurement of Educational Quality (Chile)
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SNED	National System to Evaluate School Performance (Chile)
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization
WFP	World Food Programme

goals

Millennium Development Goals

Goal 1

Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Target 1.

Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day

Target 2.

Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

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 in all levels of education no later than 2015

Goal 4

Reduce child mortality

Target 5.

Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate

Goal 5

Improve maternal health

Target 6.

Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio

Goal 6

Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases

Target 7.

Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS

Target 8.

Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

Goal 7**Ensure
environmental
sustainability****Target 9.**

Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources

Target 10.

Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation

Target 11.

Have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers

Goal 8**Develop a global
partnership for
development****Target 12.**

Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, nondiscriminatory trading and financial system (includes a commitment to good governance, development, and poverty reduction—both nationally and internationally)

Target 13.

Address the special needs of the Least Developed Countries (includes tariff- and quota-free access for Least Developed Countries' exports, enhanced program of debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries [HIPCs] and cancellation of official bilateral debt, and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction)

Target 14.

Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing states (through the Program of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and 22nd General Assembly provisions)

Target 15.

Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term

Some of the indicators listed below are monitored separately for the least developed countries, Africa, landlocked developing countries, and small island developing states

Target 16.

In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth

Target 17.

In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries

Target 18.

In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technologies

Executive summary

How can the international community reach the global goal of universal primary education and gender parity at all levels of education by 2015? This question is the focus of two of the Millennium Development Goals and of this report.

To reach the Goals, policymakers in developing countries need to take action to bring out-of-school children into the education system and to reform institutions in the education sector, from schools to ministries of education. While primary responsibility for education lies with the governments of developing countries, the international community—particularly bilateral and multilateral financing entities—must live up to key commitments already made, providing much-needed financial and political support for progressive and positive change.

The urgency of the challenge is brought into stark relief by the reality that many countries will miss the 2005 Millennium Development Goal for gender parity in primary education. If there is to be any chance of meeting the 2015 Goals, both developing country governments and the broader international community must dramatically step up the level and nature of their financial, political, and technical commitments.

More than 100 million children of primary school age are not in school, with the worst shortfalls in Africa and South Asia. Girls are disproportionately affected, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and East Asia and the Pacific, where 83 percent of all out-of-school girls live.

Completion of schooling is a significant problem. While enrollment has been increasing, many children drop out before finishing the fifth grade (UNESCO 2004b). In Africa, for example, just 51 percent of children (46 percent of girls) complete primary school. In South Asia 74 percent of children (and just 63 percent for girls) do so.

In many countries the rural/urban education gap is the most important factor explaining education differentials

Poor children are less likely to attend school...

Low levels of enrollment and completion are concentrated not only in certain regions but also among certain segments of the population. In every country completion rates are lowest for children from poor households. In Western and Central Africa, the median grade completed by the bottom 40 percent of the income distribution is zero, because less than half of poor children complete even the first year of school.

The education income gap also exacerbates gender disparities. In India, for example, the gap between boys and girls from the richest households is 2.5 percent, but the difference for children from the poorest households is 24 percent (Filmer 1999).

In some countries the main reason for low educational attainment is that children do not enroll in school. In Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, India, Mali, Morocco, Niger, and Senegal more than half of children from the bottom two income quintiles never even enroll. Elsewhere, particularly in Latin America, enrollment may be almost universal, but high repetition and drop-out rates lead to low completion rates. In both cases poor students are much more likely not to complete school.

...as are children in rural areas, children from ethnic and linguistic minorities, children with disabilities, and children affected by armed conflict

In many countries the rural/urban education gap is the most important factor explaining education differentials. In Benin the national completion rate is 39 percent, but the rural rate is just 27 percent. In Mozambique the national completion rate is 26 percent, but the rate in rural areas is 12 percent. The same pattern exists in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Madagascar, Niger, and Togo (Filmer and Pritchett 1998; Filmer 1999). Girls in rural areas register even lower levels of completion, especially in Africa. Rural girls in Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Niger register rates of primary school completion that are lower than 15 percent.

Ethno-linguistic diversity creates serious challenges in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Pakistan. In Balochistan Province (Pakistan), for example, language barriers have a significant impact on access to education, especially for girls in rural areas, where local languages predominate.

About 40 million of the world's out-of-school children have some form of disability. Just 5 percent of these children are estimated to complete primary school, and many never enroll or drop out very early.

Children subject to forced migration and children in conflict situations are particularly disadvantaged with respect to their education. In Somalia, for example, just one in five children of primary school age attends school.

Examples of successful interventions and evidence from many countries provide a menu of ideas for education leaders

Institutional problems prevent many children who do attend school from actually learning

Analyses of internationally comparable assessments of learning achievement in math, reading, and science indicate that most developing countries rank far behind OECD countries. Test results in some countries indicate that students are learning virtually nothing.

Countries with weak educational systems can learn from the many developing countries that have made progress

Many countries have managed to build education systems with universal primary completion and considerably more. China, Chile, Cuba, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, the Slovak Republic, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, and Uruguay have also improved quality and learning. Most of these are middle-income countries today, but many achieved universal primary completion when they were at similar stages of development as today's poorer countries.

Even among the poorest countries today, an encouraging number have begun to register strong and sustained increases in primary completion rates. These include many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Benin, Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Guinea, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, and Togo, for example, increased their primary completion rate by more than 3.5 percent a year—well above the median 1.5 percent annual rate of improvement for low-income countries as a whole. Bhutan, Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Nepal, Nicaragua, Mongolia, and Tajikistan are making similarly strong progress. While all of these countries face major challenges in increasing quality and efficiency—and none could yet be considered a high-performing education system—they are performing considerably better than their peers. The message from these examples is clear: low-income countries can achieve universal primary completion, and it is possible to move faster toward that Goal.

In low-income countries making progress, some key principles have guided policymakers in defining strategies and choosing interventions. Examples of successful interventions and evidence from many countries provide a menu of ideas for education leaders in countries addressing the education Goals.

- *Be pragmatic to reduce costs.* Countries that have jump-started progress toward raising primary completion rates have taken such pragmatic (though often politically difficult) steps as introducing contract teachers, shifting to low-cost school construction methods, resisting pressures to reduce class size much below 40 until universal coverage is achieved, providing free primary education and recovering a larger share of costs at other levels, and shortening the preservice teacher training cycle. All of these actions lower the unit costs of primary schooling and promote faster achievement of universal coverage.

**Countries
must improve
learning
outcomes and
educational
attainment
enough to have
an economic
and social
impact**

- *Focus on teaching and learning.* Even systems with modest standards can keep squarely focused on the teaching-learning process. This includes recruiting teachers based on content mastery; training teachers for “student-centered” or active learning instruction, not frontal teaching; measuring student learning outcomes (and giving teachers the same tests); designing good-quality curricula (in terms of both content and values), books, and materials, and producing them in a cost-effective manner; using local language instruction for the first three to four years of schooling; implementing inexpensive but effective models of in-service teacher training (master teachers, pedagogical advisers, rural teacher self-help networks); and creating performance incentives for teachers that are linked to school and student performance.
- *Make good use of the private sector.* Education systems can capitalize on what private providers can do well by allowing high-quality for-profit private firms serve the top 10 percent of the income distribution, with private finance; by contracting out with private providers; and by working with families and communities to relieve household constraints to schooling (by adapting the school calendar, for example).
- *Watch out for equity.* Education sector policymakers can ensure that the benefits of system expansion are being shared by the poor by setting clear rules for the distribution of resources across different regions and schools; by monitoring outputs and outcomes across schools and regions to identify where performance needs strengthening; by increasing support, pressure, inspection, and skill-specific capacity building that targets the lowest-performing regions and schools; by developing condensed accelerated programs to get drop-outs back in school and up to grade level; by providing targeted subsidies to get and keep vulnerable children in school; and by introducing cost-effective programs to enhance early child development (health programs, nutrition programs, and early stimulation of infants and young children).

Increasing access and improving quality are critical to achieving universal primary education by 2015

Countries that are unlikely to achieve the goal of universal primary education by 2015 (based on historical trends) face two main challenges. First, they must significantly accelerate enrollment and improve their ability to keep children in school. Second, they must improve learning outcomes and educational attainment enough to have an economic and social impact. These countries need to simultaneously increase access and improve quality. The two reinforce each other, because if schools cannot offer a quality education, parents are far less likely to send their children to school.

Parents may see primary school largely as a step their children need to take before continuing their education

How can developing countries get out-of-school children into school?

Three strategies can help get out-of-school children into school: crafting specific interventions to reach out-of-school children, increasing educational opportunities (formal and nonformal) for girls and women, and increasing access to postprimary education. All of these strategies take into account the powerful demand-side influences that affect the propensity of parents to send their children to school.

Encourage children to attend school. Specific interventions have been shown, in some settings, to get hard-to-reach children into school. These include eliminating school fees, instituting conditional cash transfers, using school feeding programs as an incentive to attend school, and implementing school health programs to reduce absenteeism. Several interventions have proved particularly successful where girls' participation is low. These include actions that increase security and privacy for girls, as well as those that reduce gender-stereotyping in the curriculum and that encourage girls to take an active role in their education.

Support mothers. Maternal education is a key determinant of children's attainment. Multiple studies find that a mother's level of education has a strong positive effect on their daughters' enrollment—more than on sons and significantly more than the effect of fathers' education on daughters. Studies from Egypt, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, and Peru all find that mothers with a basic education are substantially more likely to educate their children, especially their daughters, even controlling for other influences (Lavy 1996; Ridker 1997; King and Bellew 1991; Lillard and Willis 1994; Alderman and King 1998; Kambhupati and Pal 2001; Parker and Pederzini 2000; Bhalla, Saigal, and Basu 2003). Some data suggest that literacy programs for uneducated mothers may help increase school participation by their children, implying that support to women's literacy programs should be considered an important complement to interventions to increase access and retention at the primary school level. Adult literacy programs may be particularly useful in settings in which there are pockets of undereducated women, such as ethnic minorities or indigenous communities.

Enhance postprimary education. In some countries the demand for primary education may be determined in part by the availability of secondary education slots, because parents may intuitively understand that the economic benefits of primary schooling alone are not high enough to offset the opportunity cost of attending. Particularly where quality is low, parents may see primary school largely as a necessary step their children need to take before continuing their education.

Involved communities are able to articulate local school needs, hold officials accountable, and mobilize local resources

Success in moving close to universal primary school enrollment generates its own new challenges. As more children complete primary school, the private benefits, in higher wages, decline (though the social benefits remain high). Private rates of return—perceived and real—cease to be seen as much of a reason for sending children to primary school, unless there is access to postprimary education. In addition, both expansion of the existing education systems in many developing countries and the “scaling-up” of other public sector functions (particularly health services, water management, general public administration, and others) require a larger cadre of educated and trained workers, the products of postprimary education.

In most developing countries, secondary and other forms of postprimary schooling are heavily slanted toward better-off segments of society—and in most countries toward boys. Countries should begin to identify and implement strategies such as need-based scholarships to overcome the tendencies toward inequitable access.

How can developing countries improve their institutions?

Sustained improvements in education are impossible to achieve without improving the way key institutions in the sector function and increasing parental involvement in decisions affecting their children’s education. Many countries with poorly performing educational systems suffer from institutional weaknesses, including low management capacity, nontransparent resource allocation and accounting practices, and substandard human resources policies and practices. Incentive structures that fail to reward good performance create and reinforce the most deleterious characteristics of weak institutions.

Parents who are well informed of policies and resource allocations in the education sector and involved in decisions regarding their children’s schooling exert considerable influence and contribute solutions. Involved communities are able to articulate local school needs, hold officials accountable, and mobilize local resources to fill gaps when the government response is not adequate.

Context-specific solutions will, of course, be required to address these challenges. But five specific strategies may help policymakers craft those solutions: creating or strengthening the national commitment to education, improving accountability through local control, improving the quality and availability of the information base, conducting serious evaluations to learn what affects learning outcomes, and strengthening the role of civil society organizations.

Create or strengthen the national commitment to education. Successful education requires a strong national commitment, expressed in the legal and institutional framework as well as in budgetary outlays to the sector. A commitment to compulsory primary education signals that the nation’s leaders place high priority on education as a central pillar of development. It supports a healthy debate about what constitutes education and how it can be funded. Having

**Experiments
devolving
authority
and fiduciary
responsibilities
to parents and
communities
have produced
encouraging
results**

a strong national framework for primary or basic education, though not sufficient for the full set of institutional changes required to accelerate progress, is a necessary condition.

Improve accountability through local control. Institutional problems can be partially addressed through parental and community involvement, which anchors education in the social fabric of the community, fosters demand, and ensures that schooling provides social benefits and economic returns and reflects local priorities and values. This commitment and support are vital to ensuring that schooling remains a priority for parents. Given the opportunity cost of sending children to school rather than to work, such support cannot be taken for granted.

Experiments devolving authority and fiduciary responsibilities to parents and communities have produced encouraging results. Evidence from around the world suggests that greater school autonomy—that is, greater parental and community control—leads to higher teacher attendance. Studies in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, and a number of Indian states link reduced absenteeism to parental, community, or school leader involvement (Vegas 2002; Gaynor 1998; Gershberg and Winkler 2000; Pandey 2000; PROBE 1999; Alcazar and others 2004; Chaudhury 2004).

Oversight and authority by parent-teacher associations or parent councils bolstered student test scores in Argentina, Brazil, Nicaragua, Honduras, India, and Indonesia, and it reduced drop-out and repetition rates in a subset of these (Eskeland and Filmer 2004; Paes de Barros, Mondanca, and Soares 1998; King and Ozler 2001; Di Gropello and Marshall 2004; PROBE 1999; Pandey 2000; Alatas and Filmer 2004). In an analysis of 10 Latin American countries, parental participation had the strongest impact on student achievement, while greater community control without parental involvement was only marginally important (Gunnarsson and others 2004).

Improve the quality and availability of the information base. Information is an essential element in local control and accountability. Parents and school administrators need information about the effectiveness of their local schools. Simple indicators of relative performance—spending per child, preparation of teachers, educational outcomes compared with other schools—are essential. Such information is generally unavailable to parents, particularly the parents who are most likely to be faced with failing primary schools.

The State of Parana in Brazil has done a good job of providing parents with the information they need by introducing the *boletim da escola*, an annual school report card of the performance of each of the primary and secondary schools under its jurisdiction. The report cards seek to increase accountability of schools and government to the community. The report cards help the com-

Civil society organizations should be legitimate participants in debates about the education system

community, the government, and the school adopt a shared vision of universal primary education; they empower parents to participate in the education process; and they inform decisionmaking at all levels.

At the national level, data are required for planning for the education sector as a whole and determining how it meshes with macroeconomic policies. Good data and program evaluation also are essential for designing and assessing the cost-effectiveness and impact of a range of investments and interventions. While the degree of centralization of the education sector varies across countries, all countries require sound national data for their sectorwide plans. UNESCO's Institute for Statistics has identified a number of data system deficiencies and is working systematically to address shortcomings in the collection and reporting of data on enrollment and completion.

Conduct serious evaluations to learn what affects learning outcomes. Enrollment and completion indicators are not necessarily good or consistent predictors of outcomes, as a study of six African nations reveals. Kenya had the lowest completion rate, at 63 percent, but 65 percent of its sixth grade students achieved minimum literacy skills—a better outcome than in any other country. Malawi's completion rate was almost identical to Kenya's, at 64 percent, yet only 22 percent of its sixth grade students could demonstrate minimum literacy skills (Ellis 2003). Instituting systems for assessing the acquisition of skills and knowledge, based on international standards, and disseminating the results in a transparent way at both the national and local levels is essential.

Strengthen the role of civil society organizations. Civil society organizations play a major role in advocating for children and parents and in holding local and national governments and international organizations accountable to their commitments. They engage in both advocacy and service delivery. They are particularly effective in community participation, empowerment, literacy, community schools and development centers, reproductive health, and early childhood education (UNESCO 2001). Civil society organizations should be recognized as legitimate participants in debates about the direction of the education system.

How much will it cost to achieve universal primary education?

Achieving universal primary education will cost much more than is currently being spent by developing country governments and the international aid community. How much more varies from country to country and depends on the assumptions on which cost estimates are based.

Recent studies by UNICEF (2001), UNESCO (2003), Oxfam International (2002), the Global Campaign for Education (2003), and the World Bank (Sperling 2003) estimate that putting every child in the world in a good-

Recurrent costs, rather than capital investments, represent the bulk of required funds

quality primary school would cost \$7–\$17 billion¹ a year. The range of estimates is huge, but even the high estimate probably understates the full costs of the expansion, quality gains, and special programs, including subsidies to poor households, that are critical if all children are to complete primary school. These estimates also omit the cost of some expansion of opportunities for post-primary schooling, without which it is unlikely that all parents will see the value of having their children complete primary school.

These studies share several findings. First, they all conclude that recurrent costs, rather than capital investments, represent the bulk of required funds. Second, although the incremental costs are large, all conclude (or perhaps assume) that countries will finance a significant share from domestic resources. UNICEF, for example, assumes that countries will increase education spending by 1.1 percent a year between 2000 and 2015. Bruns, Mingat, and Rakotomalala (2003) show that if all low-performing countries matched the fiscal effort of those countries making the fastest progress in education, even low-income countries might cover 60 percent of the incremental costs—and 80 percent of the total costs—of achieving the Goal.

Third, differences across countries and regions are extremely large in terms of the affordability of reaching universal primary enrollment as well as the external financing needs. In Sub-Saharan Africa external aid will have to play the largest role, because most countries have a long way to go to meet the Goal and the capacity to mobilize domestic funds is limited. According to one estimate, African countries will need 76 percent of the total donor resources required (Bruns, Mingat, and Rakotomalala 2003). In Ethiopia, Tanzania, and many other Sub-Saharan African countries, reaching the Goal will require very large increases in external aid, even with a doubling or tripling of domestic primary spending. Some reallocation of donor funding will be necessary, as currently just 33 percent of donor resources for basic education go to Sub-Saharan Africa. Fourth, the range of estimates partly reflects different assumptions about the quality of programs and the extent to which some countries introduce institutional reforms and policy adjustments that could reduce costs while extending opportunities. The timing and depth of politically delicate steps to make systems cost-effective will greatly affect costs.

Even if developing countries increase their spending on education by more than 1 percent a year, the funding gap will be large. If progress is to be made, this gap will have to be filled by external financing. Bilateral and multilateral donors contributed about \$1.2 billion in external assistance for basic education in 2001–2002. The Global Campaign for Education estimates that at least \$10 billion in external financing will be needed, and even this figure may underestimate the full cost, because some of the additional students who complete primary school will go on to secondary school.

Providing tens of millions of additional children with access to primary school and to a good-quality education requires bold political leadership

Bold political leadership is needed in a compact between developing countries and donors

Providing tens of millions of additional children with access to primary school and to a good-quality education requires much more than additional financing. It requires bold political leadership, in both the developing countries and the rich donor countries.

This leadership can and must be forged in the context of a global compact, in which the roles and responsibilities of developing countries and donors are clear and mutually agreed upon. That clarity must then be translated into specific targets and benchmarks set by individual countries, with clear commitments from donors as a group to the ongoing financing of countries' progress. Under the compact, each side is accountable to the other for doing its part. Donors make a serious commitment and respond to countries that are doing things right, assured that external resources are being used well. Developing countries take on tough political reforms in their systems with the confidence that they will have sufficient and predictable financial support to deliver on promises made to their own citizens.

In 2002 donors took the first steps in addressing problems in the education sector. Under the umbrella of the Education for All Dakar Framework for Action, they worked with officials from developing countries to set up a Fast Track Initiative. That initiative seeks to achieve universal completion of primary school in a selected set of countries in which leadership and commitment to education have already produced visible progress. The Fast Track Initiative emphasizes greater donor coordination and focuses on broad sectoral support of national education plans. Perhaps more important, it has the potential to introduce an entirely new approach to donor financing—namely, financing that is predictable for the next decade as long as countries are making progress against mutually agreed upon benchmarks that have been set out by the country's leadership, publicly discussed, and made fully transparent and visible. Key to this approach is the provision of predictable financing linked to steady progress toward pre-agreed benchmarks.

Predictable financing would give leaders of developing countries the confidence to take on politically risky reforms. It would invite long-term investments in expanding teacher training, incorporating programs of auditing and expenditure monitoring into education systems, testing the effects of block grants to communities and of giving communities more control over teacher hiring, developing targeted programs of cash subsidies to poor households contingent on their keeping children in school, and so on. It would also permit countries that are too poor to cover the incremental recurrent costs of their new investments to do so.

The Fast Track Initiative is premised on the notion that donors need to be held accountable for their financial commitments, that national leaders need

**The major work
to achieve
universal
primary
education is
in the hands
of developing
countries**

to be accountable for reforming their education systems, and that financing and reforms have to go hand-in-hand. By rewarding ambitious country-level reforms with equally ambitious increases in donor assistance, the Fast Track Initiative has the potential to create strong incentives for country effort. It is the world's best chance for rapid progress in the poorest countries toward the education goals.

Additional and predictable resources—while not a solution alone—are critical in maintaining quality when developing countries eliminate tuition and other fees or expand postprimary schooling. Without additional resources those welcome changes in the past have led to overcrowded classrooms and acute teacher shortages, undermining the credibility of political leaders and the confidence of parents in the value of schools. At the same time, financing that is tied to agreed upon benchmarks can provide donors with the opportunity to engage with national governments in defining the concrete outcomes that constitute progress, rather than wrangling over the specifics of reform and institutional change, which ultimately make a difference only when they are shaped by the countries themselves.

What can developing countries do?

The major work to achieve universal primary education is in the hands of developing countries. They can draw on lessons from a track record of remarkable success in many countries. They can also learn from the emerging evidence on problems with management, performance, and incentives, which will be solvable only by making hard choices and taking political risks. Actions are required within the education sector as well as in the broader political and economic policy environment.

What can donors do?

Donors and international technical agencies can support positive and progressive change by strategically increasing their level of financial commitments and by improving their policies and practices. The report proposes four recommendations for donors:

- Display bold political leadership and make firm financial commitments to make Education for All and the Fast Track Initiative work.
- Reform the donor business. Commit new funds in a new way: through a strong, coordinated global effort that rewards and reinforces countries' measurable progress.
- Report on donor commitments and actions through a transparent accountability framework.
- Invest in genuine evaluation of education sector interventions.

The G8 nations should be able to mobilize a substantial portion of the external financing need over the next several years

Recommendation 1: display bold political leadership and make firm financial commitments to make Education for All and the Fast Track Initiative work

In 2005 the G8 leaders should issue a major statement supporting global education with serious contingent commitments. The more than 30 separate donors and international agencies working on education should come forward with their existing commitments for countries already selected for the fast track, and they should announce their expected future commitments for additional countries to provide the certainty and predictability necessary to inspire countries to embark on strong Education for All plans. The expected resource needs (estimated by the Fast Track Initiative Secretariat), expected funding commitments, and actual disbursements should be made public.

Seven countries—Burkina Faso, Guinea, Guyana, Honduras, Mauritania, Nicaragua, and Niger—were endorsed for Fast Track financing in 2002. The Gambia, Mozambique, Viet Nam, and Yemen were endorsed in 2003, and Ghana was endorsed in 2004. All 12 countries have prepared education plans, but financing remains elusive. What is lacking are firm and predictable donor commitments for funding in the next several years for specific countries tied to specific country plans with agreed upon benchmarks of progress. What is needed is an upfront commitment now from donors, quick action to come to agreement on country plans and benchmarks, and the roll-out of initial programs. Donors also need to commit now to sustain their financial support beyond the next few years, to adjust their support in line with progress, and to add to that support as they develop similar agreed upon programs with additional countries through 2015.

If the international community is serious about reaching the educational Goals, massive funding—on the order of spending on HIV/AIDS—needs to be committed; the paltry sums currently committed to basic education will not help most countries meet the Goals. Although HIV/AIDS funding still falls short of its ultimate needs, billions, not millions, of dollars are committed. Without a similar shift in scale, the gap in education financing cannot be closed. Donors should immediately come forward with bold, firm, and monitorable commitments to the Fast Track Initiative, at a minimum pledging steady annual increases from their current level of official development assistance for education. Together the G8 nations should be able to mobilize a substantial portion of the external financing needed over the next several years.

The processes for funding proposals, the planned approach to meet the policy challenges, and gaps in funding need to be specified and made public. While flexibility is desirable, the nature of the process requires some standardization and transparency. The Secretariat of the Fast Track Initiative should make these processes and agreements public. Doing so entails engaging with civil society, both generally and within countries, to ensure harmonization and

**Donors need to
work together
to support
country-driven
programs**

inclusion of all players. Greater transparency would provide clarity for countries interested in participating in the Fast Track Initiative. Given the confusion at the start, such efforts deserve more attention now.

Recommendation 2: reform the donor business

The Fast Track Initiative will not work unless donors complete the difficult process of reforming the way they commit and disburse funds. Donors need to work together to support country-driven programs rather than compete for the limited time, attention, and own-country funds to support “their” projects.

Donors also need to make their expectation of performance clearer. As a result of vagueness about what they expect in terms of policy and efficiency reforms, the process has not come close to the momentum needed for real progress toward the Goals.

Donors also need to make genuine commitments of sustained and predictable funding. Failure to do so has prevented countries that have worked hard to develop plans from pursuing major access and quality reforms.

Donors need to take the lead in working with the Fast Track countries, country by country, on a planned trajectory of financing tied to agreed upon benchmarks of progress. To do so, donors need to change their way of doing business. They need to pool the financing of their country’s own education plans, finance recurrent costs as well as new investments, and provide adequate support for long-term capacity building (with benchmarks measured in terms of intermediate outcomes, such as placement of recently trained local education budget managers or school directors). Whether it be through a lead donor in each country or in coordination, donors then need to sign on to the financing cum progress that can form the heart of a country compact.

Recommendation 3: use a transparent accountability framework for reporting

Under current reporting arrangements, it is extremely difficult to track and account for donor spending in education. Much aid is in nonmonetary form (in-kind contributions, technical assistance), and the difference between the amount allocated in a foreign assistance budget and the amount that gets to the ground level for program inputs is large. To date no system has been developed that allows the international community to determine whether spending by particular donors is or is not filling the gap between what is needed and what national governments are able to provide. Similarly, there is no system for reporting on whether policies and practices correspond to current imperatives and agreements on donor harmonization.

The Fast Track Initiative can play an important role in this regard. Proposals for an explicit donor accountability framework are on the table but have yet to be implemented.

There is an urgent need to better understand how well specified interventions and reforms work to increase enrollment, retention, and learning

The report offers three recommendations:

- Donors should invite civil society organizations and developing country governments to participate in reviewing the proposed framework for donor accountability. If warranted, the instruments should be modified to increase transparency and policy relevance.
- Donors should commit in writing to report under the accountability framework and to do so annually.
- Information from donors should be maintained on the Web site of the Fast Track Initiative Secretariat, reported in the Education for All Monitoring Report, and widely publicized.

Recommendation 4: invest in genuine evaluation

Given the volume of national and donor resources devoted to education, there is an urgent need to better understand how well specified interventions and reforms work to increase enrollment, retention, and learning. This can be done only if those responsible for setting spending priorities insist on a sound evidence base and help fund the generation and analysis of relevant data. Several recent examples (including the Progres/Oportunidades program in Mexico and small-scale school health interventions in other countries) attest to the feasibility and potential for policy impact of rigorous evaluation. Multilateral banks, including the World Bank, require that 1 percent of all loan proceeds be used for evaluation. All donors should adopt such requirements. Just as important is ensuring that these resources are applied to evaluation programs that use sound methodologies. Too often the policy value of evaluations is compromised by weak evaluation design or failure to collect baseline data. Findings must be made public and broadly disseminated, whether they are favorable or not.

One approach to the chronic challenge of evaluating development programs is the creation of an independent facility for funding and bringing visibility to the results of rigorous impact evaluation. This facility, which could be supported by foundations and donor governments, would contribute to the global public good of knowledge by making funding available for the design and execution of evaluations for a subset of donor-funded projects. An independent, earmarked source of funds could eliminate or reduce the tension between implementation and evaluation that has hampered evaluation initiatives within donor agencies. In addition, an independent facility would have the ability to disseminate evaluation findings and make available evaluation data in a way development agencies are unlikely or unable to do.

An independent facility is unlikely to be created overnight; many questions of governance and practice would need to be worked out, and donors would have to play a role in the facility's governance. In the meantime because research independence in designing and carrying out evaluations is so important, agencies should work together in some form of consortium that could

With more than 100 million children currently out of school, heroic efforts, not “more of the same,” will be needed to achieve the Goals

help ensure the rigor and independence of evaluations, no matter which donor is supporting the program in question. Such a collaborative effort also could bring more visibility to the results of rigorous impact evaluation.

The report proposes two recommendations:

- Donor agencies should increase their investment in rigorous impact evaluation, with an emphasis on measuring learning outcomes. The results of the evaluations should be made widely available through electronic and other means.
- Donor agencies should assess the feasibility of establishing a mechanism for independent evaluation of donor-supported interventions and create a pooled trust fund and quality assurance mechanism to support rigorous impact evaluation of education sector projects and programs, and widespread diffusion of results.

Conclusion

With more than 100 million children currently out of school, heroic efforts, not “more of the same,” will be needed to achieve the Goals. If the strategy taken by donors and developing country governments is simply to expand the existing education systems as quickly as possible by providing more financial resources, history strongly suggests that countries with relatively low levels of primary school enrollment and completion today will be in roughly the same situation in 2015, ready for the next round of international goal setting. If, however, the global community views this challenge as an opportunity to take a new, creative, and transformative approach to thinking about both education and the relationship between donors and poor countries, success is possible, not just within education but in broader social and economic outcomes as well.

This report suggests several potential levers for transforming (rather than just expanding) education systems. Systematic consultation with expert groups, civil society representatives, policymakers, and other stakeholders may reveal other, better levers. The point is not to define a closed and universal list—all genuine solutions must come from locally defined processes—but to be clear about the need to identify specific actions that induce a fundamental reorientation in failing education systems.

1

Setting the stage

The task force's contribution

How can the international community reach the global goal of universal primary education and gender parity in education? This question is the focus of two of the Millennium Development Goals endorsed by world leaders at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 (see Goals on p. xviii).

The UN Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, an expert advisory group commissioned by the UN secretary-general, was assigned to take a systematic look at how dramatic improvements in education can be achieved in the developing world. The task force, one of 10 under the auspices of the Millennium Project, was charged with developing recommendations for the international community about how to achieve the Goals.

The urgency of the task force's work is brought into stark relief by the reality that many countries will miss the 2005 Goal for gender parity in primary education. If there is to be any chance of meeting the 2015 Goals, both developing country governments and the broader international community must dramatically step up the level and nature of financial, political, and technical commitments.

The membership of the task force is diverse. Its members include presidents and directors of nongovernmental organizations in India, Nigeria, Senegal, the United States, and Zambia; leaders of activist groups in the Dominican Republic and Kenya; scholars in Luxembourg, Mexico, Senegal, the United Kingdom, and the United States; parliamentary and government officials in Brazil, Nigeria, and Uganda; and senior staff and sectoral experts of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World

Food Programme (WFP), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the World Bank.

To give adequate attention to both the gender and education Goals, the task force divided its work into two parts, with members focusing on one or both of the Goals, depending on their backgrounds and interests. Two complementary reports were prepared—this one on education and a companion report on gender equality (UN Millennium Project 2005b). Work on that report was led by Geeta Rao Gupta and Caren Grown at the International Center for Research on Women.

Task force methods

Between August 2002 and September 2004 the task force reviewed the literature on education in low- and middle-income countries, including both academic and official sources. It also commissioned new analytic work to explore topics that had not been adequately addressed (see appendix 1 for the list of commissioned papers). Task force members met four times to discuss findings and recommendations. The task force also conducted an electronic consultation with civil society organizations to obtain broad feedback on an earlier version of this report. (See appendix 2 for the summary of the e-consultation.)

Audience and organization of the report

The task force defined three main audiences for its report: policymakers in developing countries who are responsible for ensuring that the right to education is fulfilled; decisionmakers in donor countries and in international agencies on whom external financing depends; and parents, citizens, civil society, and leaders at the local, national, and international organizations who are dedicated to better education for the world's children.

Part 1 of the report sets the context for the report's messages and recommendations. It presents the overall perspective of the task force, a brief history of goal-setting in international education, and information about progress toward achievement of the Goals.

Part 2 addresses the issues and challenges of education in developing countries. It sets out four key strategies for accelerating progress and highlights the implications of the strategies for the institutional and other changes needed if the Goals are to be achieved. Part 2 is meant to present a menu, based on steps that have proven effective, which politicians, policymakers, civil society, and citizens in the developing world can use to forge their own priorities and craft their own strategies for the next decade, given their domestic and external resources and their institutional realities.

Part 3 examines an international compact between donors and developing countries, on which achievement of the education goals by 2015 depends. This compact will be realized only when it is made concrete at the country level—with predictable external financing from donors that flows in line with agreed

on and demonstrated progress in countries. This part of the report sets out the task force's recommendations to the donor community in the context of such a compact.

The contribution of the task force

Many public and private organizations have made, and continue to make, major contributions to our understanding of the shortcomings of education systems in the developing world and actions to improve the situation. Analysts and advocates alike shine bright lights on the problems of access to schools; the quality of instruction; gender-stereotyping in curricula; and safety, health, and nutrition problems that limit children's ability to attend school and receive a good-quality education. Dozens of reports have been written on topics ranging from the quality of education data to trends in gender parity and the effectiveness of school feeding programs. The task force seeks to benefit from those efforts but duplicate none of them.

Instead, the task force sees this report as a way to communicate specific findings and recommendations that members believe are both supported by the balance of the evidence and essential to achieving the required level and pace for universal primary school completion by 2015.

The task force supports the international agreements that give every child the right to a good-quality education—a right established in multiple global accords and codified in many countries' constitutions. The task force also believes that better education is fundamental to the prospects for economic and social development and is a key input into the achievement of most of the other Goals (box 1.1). For this reason, when hard choices are made about allo-

Box 1.1

How education affects achievement of the Millennium Development Goals

Source: Herz and Sperling 2003.

- *Poverty reduction*: Over the medium run, poverty reduction depends on economic growth. No country has ever achieved continuous and rapid growth without achieving an adult literacy rate of at least 40 percent. Wages and farm income almost always increase with education. The higher productivity these income gains reflect can contribute to national economic growth.
- *HIV/AIDS*: Women are now the principal victims of HIV/AIDS in poor countries. Education helps women protect themselves, both by informing them about the disease and by making them more effective in asserting their reproductive and sexual rights. Young people (15–24 years) who have completed primary education are less than half as likely to contract HIV as those with little or no schooling.
- *Maternal mortality*: Women with six or more years of education are more likely to seek prenatal care, assisted childbirth, and postnatal care, reducing the risk of maternal and child mortality and illness.
- *Child health*: Educated mothers are 50 percent more likely to immunize their children than mothers with no schooling.
- *Hunger*: Most farmers in the developing world are women. Educating girls and women leads to more productive farming and accounted for more than 40 percent of the decline in malnutrition achieved between 1970 and 1995.

cating scarce resources, education should be privileged, as long as the resources can be used in ways that improve the acquisition of knowledge and skills by a larger number of children. This report highlights and promotes actions that will increase the effectiveness of existing and additional resources.

Education and society: multiple benefits, unrealized potential

The challenge of achieving the education Goals is both central to and strongly influenced by the social and economic context. For this reason, this report focuses on the investments and institutional changes required to transform education systems in developing countries and on the role of the international donor community in supporting countries' own transformations. This chapter focuses on the larger context, to emphasize a key message: the education system cannot do it alone. Success in improving education requires tremendous political leadership and commitment by citizens, civil society leaders, bureaucrats, politicians, parents, and many others outside the education system.

Education is society's main instrument for reproducing itself and can be a key ingredient for social change

Education is about much more than children sitting in schools, acquiring skills that can be objectively tested. Both the inputs to and the outputs from education are far more complex than much of the usual international discourse suggests. Typically, the inputs to education are described in technical terms, such as the optimal pupil to teacher ratio or the availability of textbooks and chalk. Outputs are often described in economic terms, including the higher incomes associated with each additional year of education.

But because education is first and foremost the vehicle through which societies reproduce themselves, both the inputs and the outputs in an education system may more rightly be thought of as a set of ideas about how a society is structured and should be structured in the future. This means that the concept of providing every child with a good-quality education is not simply a function of having enough schools, textbooks, and teachers. It is very much a result of a social context in which education is seen as a right for all and in which all

**Changing
education
systems
requires
political
leadership and
institutional
reform, as well
as additional
investments
and inputs**

people have the opportunity to improve their economic and social welfare and participate in public life.

Decisions affecting what is taught, who is taught, and how people are taught are part of the process of social reproduction. With respect to what is taught, the leading figures within one generation transmit to the next generation their understanding of history and the essential skills, knowledge, and beliefs for the perpetuation of the society. At the technical level, this translates into the content of the curriculum, the standards for progression to the next grade, and so forth, but it is never completely removed from the much broader (and often highly politicized) context. With respect to who is taught, policies and practices related to resource allocation, placement of schools, the scope for private sector involvement, and overt or invisible barriers to access lead to outcomes that can either reduce or reinforce social stratification. With respect to how people are taught, the methods and practices in education are also means of communicating the ways in which societies are structured and should be structured in the future. Observable features of a school system—schools, teachers, school fees—are a function of broader social phenomena.

Explicitly recognizing the social reproduction objective of education helps explain the painfully slow progress toward full expansion of education and gender parity in some countries and the troubled history of many of the reform efforts that have been undertaken to increase and democratize access to educational opportunities. The evidence from too many countries is that without a concerted policy to the contrary, current education systems reinforce rather than compensate for existing inequalities: the children of the rich acquire more education than the children of the poor. Greatly increasing access to good education, which almost always means making societies more inclusive and egalitarian, is not necessarily the result desired by those with the power to make decisions. Education systems can be part of a vicious cycle, locking out generations of the poor. Changing those systems requires political leadership and institutional reform, as well as additional investments and inputs.

Given the intangible function of education in social reproduction, “solutions” to shortcomings in the education system cannot be mechanistic, nor can they easily be transferred from place to place. Insufficient education of inadequate quality cannot be effectively addressed solely by “business as usual,” that is, expanding existing systems and increasing spending on books, teacher training, and other inputs. It requires something more: changes in the incentives and institutional arrangement in the education sector that emphasize accountability to parents and communities for children’s learning. The potential for complementary systemic change in society as a whole is much greater in settings in which political and social leaders are committed to strengthening democratic institutions and to empowering parents and citizens to demand accountability in their political systems as well as in their schools.

Educating the poor triggers broader social change

A transformed education system can also be a key ingredient for change. The recommendations in this report reflect evidence on policies and practices that are most likely to trigger that kind of transformation, starting a virtuous cycle in which better access to and quality of education lead to a new social equilibrium.

Educating the poor is particularly important for triggering broader social change. Education has a special quality: the human capital acquired through formal education cannot be expropriated. In that respect it is different from land or financial assets. Education is an asset that enables its owner to earn more and to communicate and obtain information more successfully. Education that reaches the poor can contribute to a more equal society, in which power is more broadly shared, and to a more equitable pattern of growth—one that is more likely to reduce poverty. In turn, a more equitable sharing of economic and political power will prevent the concentration of wealth and power that in some societies is still associated with limited access to education for the poor (Birdsall 1999; Birdsall and Londoño 1997).

Education is an end in itself and has tremendous benefits for individuals and society

This report is grounded in the recognition inherent in the goal of universal education that access to basic education is an end in itself, a human right, and a vital part of individuals' capacity to lead lives they value. In addition, it is an important instrument with which people can improve their lives in other ways. For example, more education, particularly of women, is strongly associated with better family health and improved capacity to plan and time births. Education also enhances the capacity of poor people to participate in the political process and thus to organize for other social and political rights and to demand governments that are more representative and accountable.

Better educated people earn more, not only or primarily because they are better credentialed but also because they are more productive. Wages of educated workers are higher, as are earnings of farmers in settings in which education helps them take advantage of new seed and other technologies (Jamison and Lau 1982). Earnings of educated small business owners and other self-employed workers are also higher (T.P. Schultz 1993, 2001; T.W. Schultz 1963).

Wage returns to education vary by level and differ across economies. In most developing economies the private wage returns to higher education are very high relative to private returns to primary and secondary education. In growing economies this often reflects the fact that the demand for educated workers exceeds the supply, especially for university graduates, because educational opportunities are still limited. It also reflects the fact that those who achieve higher levels of education probably benefited at lower levels from higher quality schooling, which enabled and encouraged them to continue

and which ensures that they have more of the human capital that makes them more productive.¹

A workforce that is more skilled and has more knowledge also contributes to higher economic growth. When actual learning is measured, performance by secondary students on internationally comparable math and science tests is positively correlated with economic growth (Hanushek and Kinko 2000).²

Private returns to education are not confined to higher wages and incomes. Independent of their household income, mothers with primary education have better access to the information they need to help keep their children healthy. Education, particularly girls' education, has social returns to society at large as well, since society captures some of the benefits of improved health, lower fertility, and the at-home education that educated mothers transfer to their children (box 2.1).

Box 2.1
Educating girls
yields broad
benefits

Girls' education is strongly associated with better welfare at the individual, family, and social levels. It is a central means to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Educated mothers are more likely to send their children to school, a key to breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty (Filmer 1999; World Bank 2003; UNICEF 2004b).

- In Pakistan mothers' education is the single strongest determinant of schooling for their children, especially for girls (Sathar and Lloyd 1993).
- In Peru mothers' education increases girls' school enrollment as much as 40 percent more than fathers' education (Herz and Khandker 1991).

Women's income benefits children.

- In Guatemala it takes 15 times as much spending to achieve improvement in child nutrition when income is earned by the father rather than the mother (World Bank 1993).

Educated mothers get married later and have fewer children. With reduced fertility, mothers can concentrate more attention on each child, and they can afford to send their children to school.

- An extra year of schooling for girls reduces fertility rates by 5–10 percent. In Brazil and Peru women with no education have about six children, while women with a secondary education have about three (Herz and Khandker 1991).
- In Africa women with seven or more years of schooling marry five years later than women with no education (World Bank 1993).

Educated mothers have healthier families. Educated mothers access and use beneficial information about health care for themselves and their families and use health services more often.

- Educated mothers have better nourished children, who are less likely to die in infancy. On average one additional year of schooling for a mother results in a reduction in child or infant mortality of 9 per 1,000 (World Bank 1993).

**Education is
a potential
catalyst for
broader change,
but its power
is conditioned
by the political,
social, and
economic
context**

Education that is broadly shared ensures that growth itself will be broadly shared. Education that reaches the poor, women, and marginalized ethnic groups brings private benefits to them as well as benefits to society as whole by reducing inequality, diminishing discrimination, and creating more cohesion in the long run.

The benefits of education are conditioned by the context

Education is a potential catalyst for broader change, but its power is conditioned by the political, social, and economic context. This is most obvious in the case of the economy. Schools and education systems in themselves do not necessarily guarantee faster economic growth. High measured levels of education and human capital did not generate healthy growth in the former Soviet Union, nor have rapid increases in average education in Egypt, Latin America, and much of Africa spurred growth in the past three decades.

Where the relationship between “more” education and faster growth has failed to materialize—both within countries and between countries—one or more factors may be responsible (Pritchett 2001). First, “more” education is often assessed in terms of increased public spending on education and higher enrollments. But if education systems are weak, more spending and higher enrollment may not translate into learning and concomitant increases in the human capital stock. Second, even where the human capital stock is increasing, problems in other policy spheres (macroeconomic instability, civil unrest, market distortions) may prevent these gains from being translated into economic growth.³ Third, the effect of education on growth will be minimal if technological progress or some other key complementary factor, such as adequate infrastructure or contract enforcement, is missing (T.W. Schultz 1975, cited in Pritchett 2001). Fourth, as long as the stock of human capital remains below some threshold, marginal increases in education for a few people may be ineffective in producing growth. If one worker cannot read instructions on the factory floor, the abilities of other workers cannot be fully exploited. The deficit of the existing stock in relation to some critical threshold, combined with adverse economic structure and low organizational and institutional capacity, may be one reason why some of the world’s poorest countries seem caught in a poverty trap, emergence from which requires a major development effort across several fronts.⁴

East Asia’s experience over the past five decades suggests the role other factors play in ensuring that education contributes to growth. Educational systems were relatively good, market and other distortions were limited, technology was adapted, and investment in infrastructure and other complementary inputs was high. In this context, education contributed to high and relatively equitable growth (Birdsall, Ross, and Sabot 1995).

The importance of the context means that while education has pride of place among the Goals, other Goals also matter for education; achieving

The effect of economic shocks on education is one of many reasons that leaders in the education sector need to work with their colleagues in finance and planning

the Goals of universal completion of primary schooling and gender parity in schooling depends, in particular, on a supportive economic environment. The economy affects both the supply of and demand for education.

On the supply side, stagnant economies have fewer resources to invest in children's education. The contrast between Latin America and East Asia is instructive. In 1960 educational attainment in the two regions was comparable, and Latin America was, on average, somewhat wealthier. Today the two regions spend similar shares of GDP on education, but East Asia's rapid growth during the intervening decades means that this share comes out of a larger pie. The faster spread of education also led to a rapid decline in fertility, so that spending the same percentage of GDP finances much higher spending per child.

On the demand side, the returns to education are lower in slow-growing economies, thereby blunting incentives to send children to school. In the short run, the effects can be overcome by the kinds of interventions discussed below (such as subsidies to poor families to keep their children in school), but the cost of doing so is higher than it is in economies enjoying healthy growth. One of the explanations for declining or stagnating enrollment ratios in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s is that there were fewer jobs for graduates in the private and public sectors. Consequently, private returns to education fell, reducing the incentive to stay in school (Mehrotra and Vandemoortele 1997). In Latin America returns to primary and secondary schooling tend to be low relative to tertiary schooling. Consequently, the incentive to progress through primary school to secondary school is low, except for those who expect to be able to go on to university. The result is a polarized distribution of education and income (IDB 1998; Lopez-Acevedo 2001; Blom, Verner, and Holm-Nielsen 2001).

An example of how the economic context can undermine educational progress is the effect of economic shocks. Low- to middle-income countries are vulnerable to external shocks—be they from a sudden decline in the price of a commodity like coffee (on which Nicaragua, Uganda, and other very poor countries are highly dependent) or a global financial crisis like the one that hit Latin America and East Asia in the 1990s, cutting off credit and raising the prices poor urban consumers face. External shocks hit schools and poor families hard. Even if governments manage to maintain spending on teacher salaries, spending for books and school meals may be withdrawn. These shocks force many families to take their children out of school to save the cost of uniforms and notebooks and to put them to work in the fields or the streets (box 2.2).

The effect of economic shocks on education is one of many reasons that leaders in the education sector need to work with their colleagues in finance and planning. The effect of shocks cannot be offset by the education system itself. Governments need to be able to increase domestic spending on safety net

The social context in which educational opportunities are increased for girls and women also affects the extent to which they benefit from that education

programs (that is, programs that help the poor keep their children in school) or to quickly access external financing.

Education is also critical for empowering women. Educated women become more effective agents, able to improve both their own well-being and their families' welfare. They are better equipped to extract the most benefit from available services and existing opportunities and to take advantage of alternative opportunities, roles, and support structures. These empowering effects of women's education are manifested in a variety of ways, including increased income-earning potential, ability to bargain for resources within the household, decisionmaking autonomy, control over their own fertility, and participation in public life.

But as is the case with economic benefits, the social context in which educational opportunities are increased for girls and women also affects the extent to which they benefit from that education. The benefits for women are strongly conditioned by a number of factors, including the level of economic development, the depth of the labor market and, in particular, the degree of gender stratification. The impact of women's education is greater in settings that are already relatively egalitarian. Under such conditions, even modestly educated women are more likely to participate in important family decisions, to work in nonfarm occupations, and to control economic resources (Malhotra, Pande, and Grown 2003).

In areas that are more gender stratified, women are far more likely than men to be denied access to resources and prevented from exercising their own autonomy. In these settings, education alone will not be transformative in ensuring women's full participation in economic, social, and political unless other normative shifts and changes in power relations also take place. In coun-

Box. 2.2
Macroeconomic shocks have profound effects on education

School attendance and literacy rates decline during macroeconomic crises. Secondary school enrollment in the Philippines increased only 0.9 percent between 1997/98 and 1998/99, after growing at an average annual rate of 2.6 percent the previous five years (World Bank 2000). In Mexico the dropout rate in rural areas rose 40 percent during the debt crisis of the 1980s. In Argentina and Mexico growth in gross primary enrollment slowed in 1995 following the Latin American debt crisis, which caused poverty and inequality to rise (Lustig 2000; World Bank 2000). In South India children are taken out of school in response to adverse shocks (Jacoby and Skoufias 1997).

Economic crises increase transitory poverty (Jalan and Ravillion 1997; Gaiha and Deolalikar 1993). They can also increase persistent or chronic poverty, by causing hard-to-reverse effects on the human capital of poor people. In Indonesia the drop-out rate in the lowest fourth of the income distribution rose from 1.3 percent in 1997 to 7.5 percent in 1998 among students 7–12 and from 14.2 percent to 25.5 percent among students 13–19. The proportion of poor children not enrolled in school increased from 4.9 percent to 10.7 percent (Lustig 2001).

Attaining major improvements in education requires good economic policies and progress on gender equality outside of the education system

tries such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia women are well educated, but they nevertheless lack opportunities for employment or participation in public life.

A good example of the effect of the broader context on the benefits of education is fertility. Increases in women's education are associated with declines in fertility around the globe. But how much education is needed to achieve an effect? A review of 59 studies from many different countries found that the level of women's education associated with a 10 percent decline in the fertility rate varies with the degree of gender stratification. In the most inegalitarian settings, the gap in schooling between boys and girls is also greatest (Jejeebhoy 1996).

Recent research shows a link between macroeconomic downturns and education indicators. The average annual increase in years of schooling in 18 Latin American countries fell from 1.9 years in the 1950s and 1960s to 1.2 in the 1970s and 1980s. Worsening macroeconomic conditions (short-term GDP shocks, volatility, and adverse trade shocks) explain 80 percent of the decline, according to one study (Behrman, Duryea and Székely, 1999). As evidence from Mexico shows, the negative "income effect" of falling income tends to outweigh the positive "price effect" of the lower opportunity cost of attending school (Binder 1999). Simulation results suggest that the gross secondary enrollment rate in Mexico would have been 11 percentage points higher in 1991 if the economy had grown during the 1980s at half the rate of the 1970s.

The clear links between the economic and social context, including the demand for skilled labor and the degree of gender stratification, suggest that attaining major improvements in education requires good economic policies and progress on gender equality outside of the education system. It is difficult to imagine major change occurring without improvement in education performance. But countries cannot depend on the education system alone to be the engine of economic, political, and social change.

Does this mean that education sector performance depends entirely on matters out of the hands of those responsible for education policies and programs? No. What it means is that the achievement of universal primary education must be supported by both positive actions within the sector on the one hand and a progressive political environment and sound economic and social policies on the other. These policies include the policies of developing countries themselves, such as creating safety nets for vulnerable populations. They also include policies and practices of the rich countries, including trading regimes, financial sector stability, and other factors that may seem removed from primary education but are in fact of tremendous importance. Rich countries also have the financial capacity to help finance educational investments in low-income countries and to support countercyclical safety net financing when middle-income countries are hit hard by shocks, an issue addressed in part 2.

The Goals and the history of goal-setting in education

The Goals related to education are closely linked to the Education for All Framework of Action established at the Dakar World Education Forum in 2000. Both were agreed to by major international actors, including the donor community, education specialists, and the technical agencies of the United Nations.

Unlike the Goals, Education for All covers much more than formal primary education. It includes expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children; ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programs; achieving a 50 percent improvement in adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for adults; and improving all aspects of the quality of education so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes, especially in literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills, are achieved by all.

The Goals and Education for All are part of a long tradition of far-reaching, high-level goals established by UN agencies and other international bodies. Since World War II every 10 years or so an international body has identified achievement of universal primary education across all countries in the world as a goal. The timeframe set for the goal has typically been 20 years. A similar series of goals has been set for gender parity in primary (and higher) levels of education (Clemens 2004) (tables 3.1 and 3.2).

The impact of goal-setting is not obvious, though the repeated calls for progress may have encouraged leaders, parents, and other citizens in developing countries to go beyond whatever efforts they would have made anyway. Certainly trends in public spending, development assistance, and enrollments, all of which follow a long-term, general upward trajectory, were more positive

Table 3.1
International goals
for universal primary
education, 1934–2002

Source: Multiple sources, cited
in Clemens 2004.

Target year	Approved	Forum
—	1934	International Conference on Public Education, Geneva
	1948	UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, New York
	1951	International Conference on Public Education, Geneva
	1952–54	UNESCO Regional Conferences on Free and Compulsory Education, Bombay, Cairo, and Lima
1980	1960	UNESCO Meeting of Representatives of Asian Member States on Primary and Compulsory Education, Karachi (Karachi Plan)
	1961	UNESCO Conference of African States on the Development of Education in Africa, Addis Ababa (Addis Ababa Plan)
	1962	UNESCO Conference of Ministers of Education and Those Responsible for Economic Planning, Santiago (Santiago Plan)
	1966	UNESCO Conference of Ministers of Education and Ministers Responsible for Economic Planning in the Arab States, Tripoli
	1970	International Development Strategy for the Second UN Development Decade, New York
2000	1979	UNESCO Conference of Ministers of Education and Those Responsible for Economic Planning of Member States in Latin America and the Caribbean, Mexico City
	1980	International Development Strategy for the Third UN Development Decade, New York
	1990	UNICEF World Summit for Children
	1990	World Conference on Education for All, Jomtien (Jomtien Declaration)
	1993	Education for All Summit of Nine High-Population Countries, Delhi (Delhi Declaration)
2015	1995	Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action)
	1996	Shaping the 21st Century, OECD Development Assistance Committee
	2000	World Education Forum, Dakar (Dakar Declaration)
	2000	Millennium Summit, New York (Millennium Declaration)
	2001	Road map for the Implementation of the UN Millennium Declaration
	2002	UNICEF Special Session on Children
	2002	UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child

in the past five decades in the developing world than they were in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the now-industrial countries (figures 3.1 and 3.2) (Clemens 2004).

A variety of problems has diminished the usefulness of goal setting. First, much goal setting has been characterized by an imperfect link between the political, or rhetorical, level and the technical level. That is, the feasibility of the goals was not established before the language was adopted. Second, in many cases the indicators chosen have not been the best measures of the concepts of interest. In education, for example, many observers believe there has been an overemphasis on increasing enrollments, with too little attention paid to retention and completion (“survival” through the end of a school cycle) or to the even more important indicator of learning outcomes. Third, global

Table 3.2
International
development goals
for gender parity in
education, 1960–2001

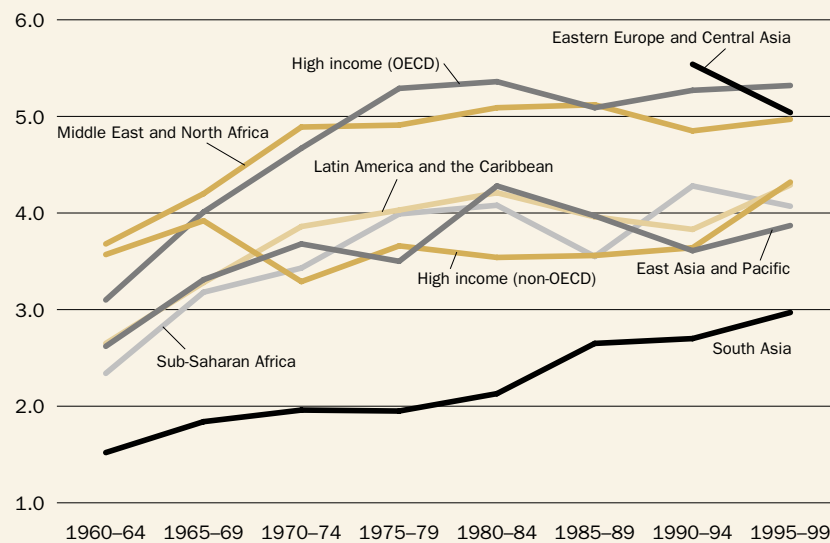
Source: Multiple sources, cited in Clemens 2004.

Target year	Approved	Forum
—	1960	UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education
	1967	UN Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
	1981	UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
1980	1975	World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Women's Year, Mexico City
1995	1980	Program of Action for the Second Half of the United Nations Decade for Women, Copenhagen
2000	1985	Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women Towards 2000
	1993	UNESCO and UNICEF Pan-African Conference on the Education of Girls (Ouagadougou Declaration)
2005	1995	Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action)
	1996	Shaping the 21st Century, OECD Development Assistance Committee
	2000	World Education Forum, Dakar (Dakar Declaration)
2015	2000	Millennium Summit, New York (Millennium Declaration)
	2001	Road map for the implementation of the UN Millennium Declaration

Figure 3.1
Public spending on
education has risen
in the past 40 years,
but it varies widely
across regions

Percent of GDP, five-year averages, 1960–99

Source: World Bank 2002.



goals that represent a uniform vision of where countries should be headed have obscured the tremendous heterogeneity across countries and regions. For example, at least at the national level, many Latin American countries have already surpassed most of the goals that seem unreachable without major acceleration by many of the poorest African countries (figure 3.3). Fourth, goal-setting in education has tended to focus almost exclusively on expansion of access, particularly through increasing the number of schools and teachers; demand-side constraints of various kinds have generally been ignored. Finally, in both rich and poor countries, agreement by world leaders in a global forum

does not guarantee their commitment once they return home. International goals reflect priorities that may not withstand competing pressures by domestic constituencies.

Despite these problems recent goal setting has led to concrete efforts at the international level. In particular, Education for All set the stage for the establishment in 2000 of the annual publication of the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* and in 2002 of the Fast Track Initiative, a program designed to mobilize supplementary external funding for national education plans.

Figure 3.2
Bilateral official development assistance for education has risen, too
 Share of developing countries' aggregate GDP (%)

Source: OECD Creditor Reporting Service.

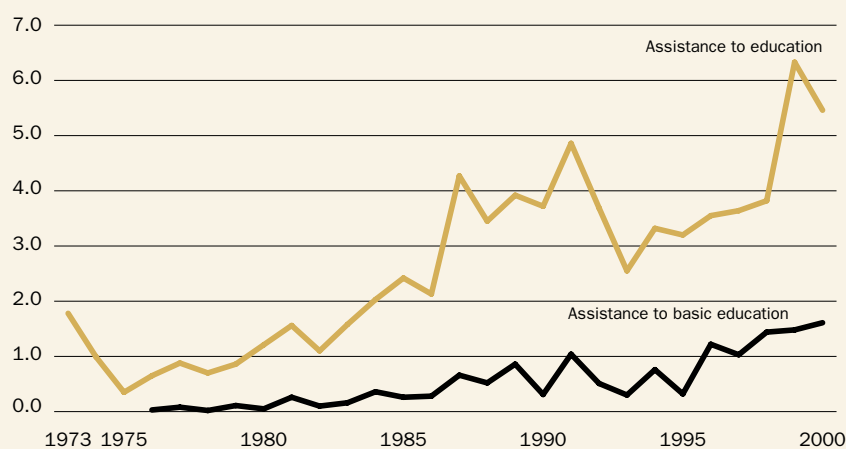
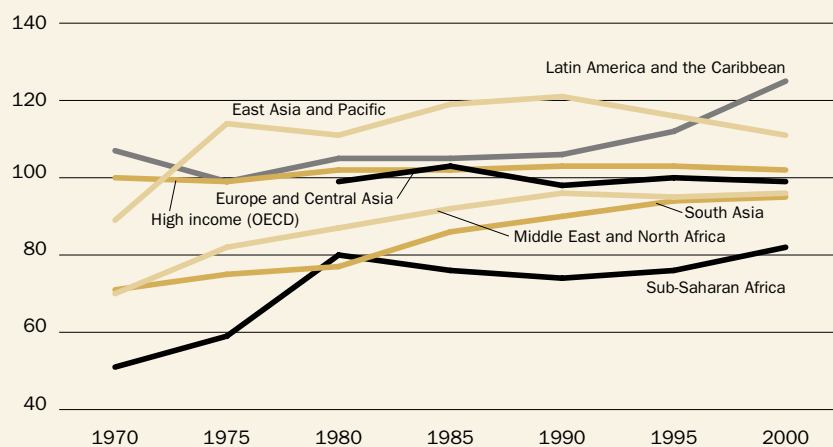


Figure 3.3
Gross primary enrollment ratios have remained fairly static since the 1980s
 Gross primary school enrollment (%)

Source: World Bank 2004.



Trends in primary education and gender parity

Recent history may be only a rough guide to the future. But trends in primary school completion and gender parity across the regions of the world are nevertheless instructive in highlighting the greatest challenges.

Global and regional primary school completion rates have improved since 1990, but many countries are far off track for meeting the Goal and gender disparities remain. An (imperfect) indicator of the success of the education system is primary school completion.¹ About 81 percent of children in the developing world—and just 51 percent of children in Sub-Saharan Africa—complete primary school (table 4.1). As far from the Goal of universal primary education as these figures are, they represent important gains since 1990.

World and regional averages obscure the sharp differences in completion rates across countries. Brazil, Cambodia, the Gambia, and Nicaragua registered increases in primary school completion rates of up to 20 percentage points during the 1990s. Elsewhere—in Afghanistan, Albania, Bahrain, Cameroon, the Republic of Congo, Iraq, Kenya, Madagascar, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, and Zambia—primary school completion declined (Bruns, Mingat, and Rakotomalala 2003).

Around the world primary school completion rates for girls rose substantially in the 1990s, and gender parity is one of the fastest-moving development indicators. Progress has not yet erased a significant differential, however. In the developing world as a whole, 85 percent of boys and just 76 percent of girls complete primary school. Gender parity exists in East Asia and the Pacific, and in Latin America primary school completion rates are actually higher for girls. But in Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and particularly South Asia, completion rates of girls lag behind those of boys.

Table 4.1
Primary completion
rates, by region and
gender, 1990 and 2000
Percent

Region	1990			2000 ^a		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
East Asia and the Pacific	92	97	96	98	98	97
Europe and Central Asia	85	95	90	93	95	93
Latin America and the Caribbean	71	64	69	85	81	83
Middle East and North Africa	71	84	78	78	86	83
South Asia	59	77	68	63	84	74
Sub-Saharan Africa	43	57	50	46	56	51
All developing countries	65	79	73	76	85	81

Note: Figures are population-weighted averages.

a. For some countries the last available year is 1999.

Source: Bruns, Mingat, and Rakotomalala 2003, based on World Bank database on primary school completion.

In some countries severe gender disparities in primary completion rates fell during the 1990s only as a result of declines in boys' completion rates. In other countries, including Bangladesh, Tunisia, and Sri Lanka, a variety of policy instruments has increased gender parity. Local programs, such as those in Balochistan Province in Pakistan, have also increased girls' enrollment and completion (see appendix 3).

Gender concerns go far beyond the quantitative indicators of enrollment and completion, however. A wide body of research and practice highlights the lack of gender sensitivity in school curriculum and classroom interactions, in which boys' participation is favored over girls'. Elimination of these differentials, which do not show up in statistics, is critical to achieving true gender parity in education.

A host of factors affect enrollment and retention rates

Although the education and gender parity Goals fail to include an explicit distributional (or equity) dimension, achieving universal primary education requires that progress in access and completion disproportionately benefit poor and otherwise disadvantaged children. These are the children who are out of school or leaving school before they reach fifth or sixth grade, the children for whom educational quality is lowest and support systems at home weakest.

In many developing countries education inequalities across income and ethnic groups are great. Geographic and language barriers also contribute to educational inequalities. Education inequality includes lack of access for specific groups, quality disparity, and inequality of opportunities, which affects completion.

Differences by household income

In every country completion rates are lowest for children from poor households. Moreover, the education income gap exacerbates gender disparities. Girls from poor households register very low levels of completion in many

In some countries the main reason for low educational attainment is that children do not enroll in school

countries (Bruns, Mingat, and Rakotomalala 2003). In India, for example, there is a 2.5 percent difference in the enrollment of girls and boys from the richest households, while the difference is 24 percent for children from the poorest households (Filmer 1999).

In South Asia failure to complete schooling is more concentrated among the poor. In India, for example, 38 percent of children never complete grade 5. Sixty-one percent of these children come from the poorest 40 percent of households. In Latin America a smaller fraction of children fail to complete fifth grade (12–32 percent), but they are disproportionately poor, with more than 70 percent coming from the poorest 40 percent of households. In East Asia, too, children who are out of school are overwhelmingly poor (Filmer and Pritchett 1998).

In Western and Central Africa, the median grade completed by the bottom 40 percent of the income distribution is zero, because less than half of poor children complete even the first year of school. By contrast, the wealthiest quintile has a median of four to six years of completed schooling. In Eastern and Southern Africa, the gap is smaller, ranging between one and three years. The gap between rich and poor is highest in South Asia. India has the largest gap of all—a 10-year difference between the median attainment of the poor (zero years) and the rich (10 years). In Pakistan the difference is nine years. In Latin America the gap between rich and poor is about four years. In East Asia the gap is three years.

In some countries the main reason for low educational attainment is that children do not enroll in school. In Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, India, Mali, Morocco, Niger, and Senegal, more than half of the children from the poorest two income quintiles never even enroll. Low rates of enrollment are a particularly important problem in South Asia. In other countries enrollment may be almost universal, but high repetition and drop-out rates lead to low completion rates. This is a common pattern in Latin America. In both cases, poor students are disproportionately represented among those who fail to complete primary school.

Using household survey data from the Demographic and Health Surveys in 35 developing countries, Filmer and Pritchett (1998) and Filmer (1999) found evidence of differentials in school enrollment and attainment by income levels. They found the following patterns:

- The difference in school completion by income levels is relatively small in some countries and extremely large in other countries.
- In countries with the lowest average enrollment and completion rates (countries in Western and Central Africa and South Asia), first grade enrollment rates are very low among the poor.
- Among countries with high education attainment averages, almost all poor children enroll in first grade. But these children are more likely to drop out of school—after just one or two years of schooling in some

In many countries the rural-urban education gap is the most important factor explaining education differentials

cases. In these countries (including most Latin American countries), completion rates are much lower than enrollment rates.

- Education differentials by income exacerbate gender disparity, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Differences between urban and rural settings

In many countries the rural-urban education gap is the most important factor explaining education differentials. In Mozambique average completion is 26 percent, but rural completion is just 12 percent. The same pattern exists in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Madagascar, Niger, and Togo (Filmer and Pritchett 1998; Filmer 1999).

Girls in rural areas register even lower levels of completion, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Niger primary school completion among rural girls is 15 percent (Bruns, Mingat, and Rakotomalala 2003).

Differences across ethno-linguistic groups

In Latin America indigenous children have lower enrollment rates than non-indigenous children (Menezes 2003). In Mexico school enrollment rates for indigenous people are 20 percent below the national average, even after decades of multilingual and multicultural public education programs. In Brazil and Ecuador completion rates are higher for white children than for black or indigenous children. In Guatemala and Peru language barriers delay primary school enrollment and are correlated to poor school achievement. Ethnic differences in school enrollment rates also exacerbate gender disparities. In Peru 65 percent of indigenous women and girls are illiterate; the comparable figure for the nonindigenous population is 26 percent (Menezes 2003).

Ethno-linguistic diversity creates serious challenges in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Pakistan. In Balochistan Province (Pakistan), four languages are spoken in addition to the national language (Urdu). Language barriers have had a significant impact on education access, especially for girls in rural areas, where local languages predominate. By the end of the 1980s, just 1–2 percent of women in Balochistan's rural areas were literate (Anzar 1999).

Educating children in conflict and postconflict countries

The imprecision of data for the world's forced migrants makes it impossible to accurately estimate the impact of conflict on education. UNESCO estimates that 50 million people are displaced throughout the world due to crisis, conflicts, and emergencies and that 70–80 percent of these people are women and children (UNESCO 2004c). The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children estimates that half of all forced migrants are children (Sommers 2002). Girls are at a particular disadvantage in conflict situations, because they are at risk of gender-based violence and are responsible for caring for siblings.

People affected by these emergency situations find it extremely difficult to provide their children with quality primary education. In Somalia, for example, only about one in five children of primary school age attends school. According to UNICEF (2004a), Somalia has just 1,192 functioning schools, most of which are in or around urban areas. Conflict has contributed to Somalia's very low enrollment, one of the lowest rates in the world.

Educating children with disabilities

About 40 million of the world's out-of-school children have some form of disability. Less than 5 percent of these children are estimated to complete primary school, and many never enroll or drop out very early. The education Goals clearly cannot be met without concerted and informed efforts to reach children with disabilities.

Many disabilities are not visible. They include speech and learning difficulties and physical, cognitive, sensory, and emotional disorders. Children also suffer from HIV/AIDS and other debilitating diseases.

Even children with mild or moderate disabilities are less likely to attend school, and if they do attend they are more likely to repeat grades and drop out. Left without an education, they are doubly disabled.

Table 4.2
Test results for
selected developing
countries

Source: Pritchett 2004.

Country and year	Age or grade	Description of test	Findings and study
Bangladesh 1998	11 and older	Basic learning skills in reading, writing, and written and oral mathematics. Professional panel specified minimal acceptable levels of performance for each area based on minimum skills considered necessary to function in the market place.	About two-thirds of rural test-takers who had completed primary school failed to achieve the minimum competency level in all four basic skill areas (Greaney and others 1998).
India 2000	Standards 3 and 4	Pretest and posttest administered for schools with and without remedial education assistance. Test included a math section and language section testing competencies prescribed by the Vadodara Municipal Corporation.	Only 5.4 percent of third-standard children in Vadodara and 14 percent in Mumbai demonstrated minimum competencies in math (Banerjee and others 2003).
Tanzania 1998–2000	Grade 7	Primary School Leaving Certificate testing skills in language, math, and general knowledge.	Only 21 percent of test-takers passed the language section, 19 percent passed the math section, and 22 percent passed the general knowledge section (National Exam Council of Tanzania).
Ghana 1994	Primary school	Raven's Progressive Matrices test, which measures abstract thinking ability, reading, and mathematics.	After six years of primary schooling, mean scores on the simple reading test were equivalent to random guessing (Glewwe and Jacoby 2000, cited in Lavy 1996).

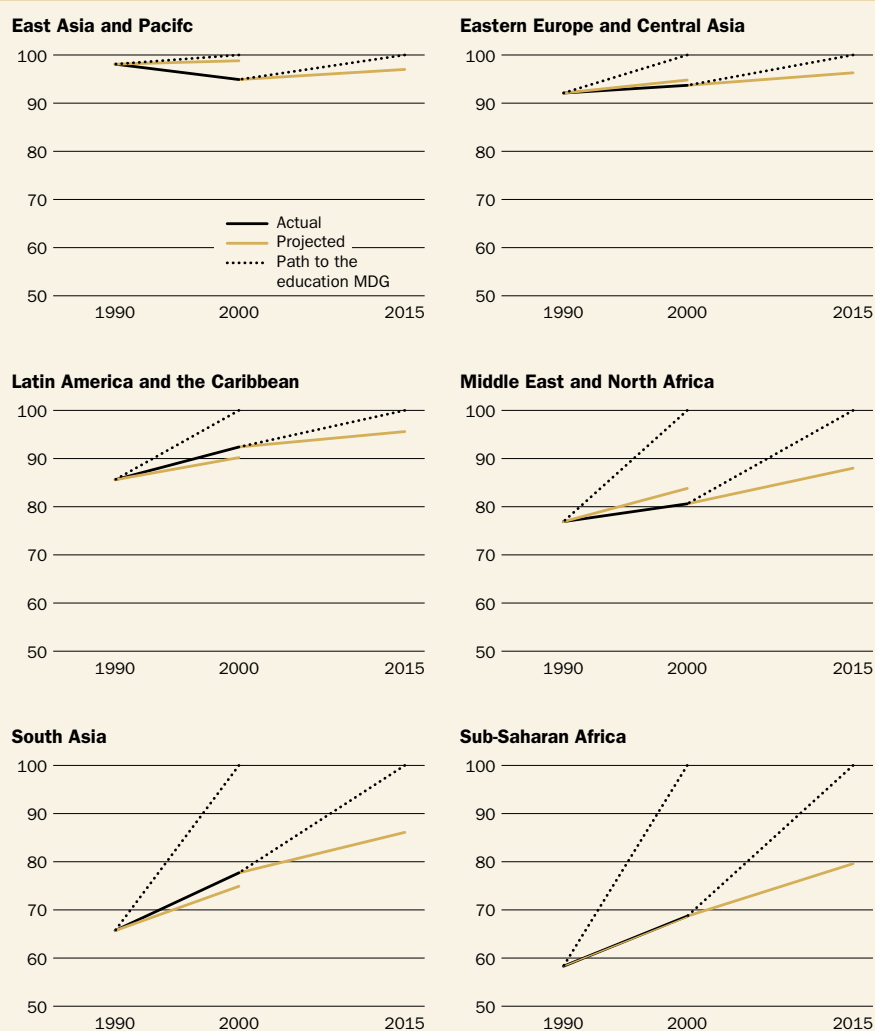
Learning achievement needs to be measured

Measuring learning achievement is methodologically difficult and not systematically undertaken in the developing world. But it is an essential part of the puzzle if genuine education rather than just participation in schooling is to improve.

Analyses of internationally comparable assessments of learning achievement in math, reading, and science show that most developing countries rank far behind OECD countries. In fact, the best performing students in most developing countries perform at or below the level of the average student in OECD countries. This grossly overstates population-based achievement, of course, because in OECD countries education is universal, and in most developing countries a significant fraction of the school-age population is out of school and would not take the standardized test (Pritchett 2004).

Figure 4.1
Primary net enrollment will need to increase dramatically in many regions if the Goal is to be met
Primary enrollment (%)

Source: Clemens 2004.

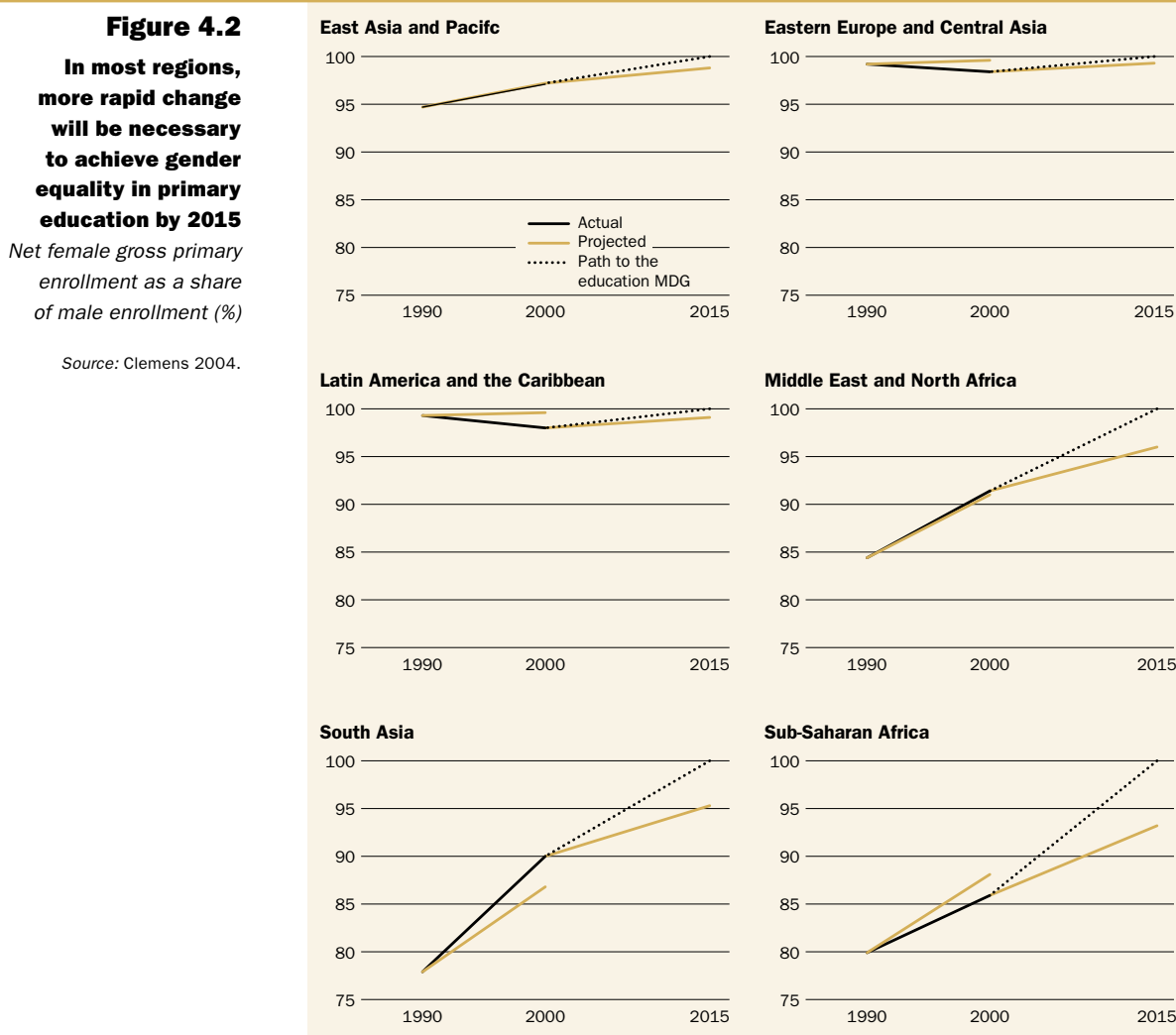


The data on performance of students on national examinations is equally alarming. Performance on national examinations in South Asian and African countries shows major gaps in acquisition of knowledge and skills (table 4.2).

Conclusions and future prospects

Quickening the pace of progress toward universal primary education in the developing world will be a very tall order. An historical analysis of trends in enrollment from 1865 to the present shows both that there is a remarkably consistent pattern of transition from low to high enrollment (and from low to high gender parity) and that the transition in education coverage in many developing countries has been much faster than the historic transition exhibited by most developed nations (Clemens 2004).

Unless current trends change significantly, however, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of universal primary education and gender parity in



education will not be met in many countries in the developing world (figures 4.1 and 4.2). Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe and Central Asia will be extremely close to the goals if current trends continue. But Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa will be at least 10 percentage points away from universal primary education.

Meeting the Goals will require addressing a variety of challenges:

- Primary enrollment and completion rates are lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia—two regions that are also characterized by particularly low levels of girls' participation in school.
- In high-enrollment settings, including middle-income countries, dropout rates among the poor are a serious problem.
- Girls make up a disproportionate share of out-of-school children. Children who are out of school tend to be poor, live in rural areas, belong to an ethnic minority, have a disability, or live in a region affected by or recovering from conflict.
- Being in school does not ensure that education is occurring. Major gaps in learning achievement are evident even where children are in school.