

ECOSOC High-Level Segment 2005:

The international community's first commitment to education as a basic human right is, of course, contained in Article 26 of the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (adopted on 10 December 1948). International conferences and declarations, such

identified at national, regional and local levels where specific progress can be measured. The Task Force on Education concludes: 'Achieving the MDG in education will require a major change in the approach to education at both the international and the country levels' ⁽³⁾

This is not to underestimate the task. All societies reproduce themselves through their education systems and the non formal or informal learning opportunities they provide. The state of a country's education reflects the political, social and economic context. This is not new. The context is simply more complex in 2005 than it was even in the 1990s, with the impact of globalization, insecurity and changing multilateral relations. An increasing number of countries are directly and indirectly affected by conflict. The Task Force on Education and Gender Equality also reported that nearly half of the 104 million out-of-school children, two-thirds of whom are girls, live in countries in conflict or post-conflict settings ⁽⁴⁾. Girls and women are the first and most severe victims in conflict and crisis. Women in poverty find their plight exacerbated by the instability and violence that prevail in these situations. They are increasingly the head of lone parent families in poverty. Conflict increases the likelihood of their poverty and vulnerability. Yet, formal education and access to out-of-school youth and adult literacy provision on their own cannot be expected to effect change for the major political and economic problems confronting today's world.

The state of primary education in the world: the data

The latest available data in the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005 on three indicators gives a fair idea of the state of primary education. The expansion of formal schooling is slowly reducing the number of out-of-school children of primary-school age, from 106.9 million in 1998 to 103 million in 2001. But this pace will not lead to universal primary education by 2015 under current circumstances. Girls represent some 57% of out-of-school children (more than 60% in the Arab States and South and West Asia), as against 59.5% in 1998. The net enrolment ratio (NER) gives part of the picture as well. It

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been achieved. In a large number of countries, significant progress cannot be made in the current political and economic climate. The poorest countries and the poorest families within those countries are the most severely disadvantaged. They may even be unable to meet their basic food needs, which also prevent them from sending their children to school and instead keeping them at home to help with family chores or support the generation of income. But in the growing number of countries affected by international or internal conflict and crisis or natural disaster, poverty is aggravated by destruction, displacement and failed state institutions to ensure public services. Schools themselves may be 'dysfunctional' for many reasons including teacher absenteeism due to lack of motivation or infrequent pay. The devastating impact of HIV/AIDS on teachers and learners alike is increasingly taking a direct toll on the availability of schooling at all. Furthermore, schools may provide little in the way of real learning opportunities and outcomes or they may appear to be the result of a distant government that is not responsive or accountable to local communities. Also, while educational spending may actually increase, it may not reach learners in the form of well-constructed school buildings, textbooks and trained teachers. The language of instruction may be an obstacle to learning or teachers may not be trained to

What are the key ingredients of reform and accountability at international organization, donor community and national levels to ensure that goals set for the past fifty years relating to the Millennium Development Goal 2 and the Dakar goals are met?

How can commitments become actions to reduce the growing disparities between rich and poorer countries' abilities to address their own needs in educational policy, institutional capacity-building, reliable data and sustained finance for primary education and youth and adult literacy provision?

Notes:

- (1) Birdsall, Nancy and Levine, Ruth (2004) Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality. Final Report on Achieving the Millennium Development Goal of Universal Primary Education, Draft, page 13).
- (2) Cited in Limage, Leslie. (1987) 'The Right to Literacy', in Human Rights and Education edited by Norma Tarrow, Pergamon, Press, London, page 82. (from United Nations, 1981, page 19).
- (3) Op.cit., page 17.
- (4) Grown, Caren, Gupta, Geeta and Kes, Aslihan (2005). Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women. UN Millennium Project, Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, Earthscan, London, page 45).
- (5) UNESCO (2004), Ibid, pages 130-131.
- (6) World Bank. (2004) World Development Report

Annex 3: UNITED NATIONS LITERACY DECADE (2003-2012) AND LIFE

The United Nations General Assembly declared the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012) with UNESCO as lead agency. UNLD follows United Nations International Literacy Year 1990, where UNESCO promoted literacy skills acquisition for all age groups in both developing and industrialized countries. In 1990, ILY promoted positive ways of addressing literacy issues and long-term sustained commitment. The stigmatizing and simplistic labels attached to 'illiteracy' as ignorance or the battle language of inflated rhetoric were avoided. Also, ILY stressed a continuity of concern for basic skills acquisition for very young children (pre-school age), language and literacy in schools, as well as adult and out-of-school youth programmes with equivalency and public guarantees of quality and relevance. Although the international community turned its attention more to primary education in 1990, the focus remained on basic skills acquisition for very young children (pre-school age), language and literacy in schools, as well as adult and out-of-school youth programmes with equivalency and public guarantees of quality and relevance. Although the international community turned its attention more to primary education in 1990, the focus remained on basic skills acquisition for very young children (pre-school age), language and literacy in schools, as well as adult and out-of-school youth programmes with equivalency and public guarantees of quality and relevance.