



**ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review
Regional Preparatory Meeting for Africa**

**“The right to Education for All in Africa:
Reinforcing quality and equity”**

Background

The Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) is a key function of the Economic and Social Council established by Heads of State and Government at the 2005 World Summit. It was mandated as an instrument to track progress and step up efforts towards the realization of the internationally agreed development goals (IADGs), including the Millennium Development Goals, by the 2015 target date.¹

story is that 40% of the primary school leavers cannot read. Concerning goal 3, (technical and vocation education) the GER has decreased from 9% in 2000 to 7% in 2008. Regarding goal 4 (increasing adult literacy), much remains to be done: the number of illiterate people in Africa increased from 140 million in 2000 to 153 million in 2008, the majority of whom are girls and women. Concerning goal 5 (achieving gender parity and equality), in 2008, there were 94 girls to 100 boys enrolled in primary school. In the first cycle of secondary education this was only 84%. Finally regarding goal 6 (improving the quality of education), the situation is still quite challenging: some 40 per cent of pupils having attended grade 5 of primary school can neither master the basic competences required to avoid a relapse into illiteracy nor have the basic skills required to perform a job.

2. Situation of financing of education

There are significant disparities in education financing between countries in the African region. For example, Sub-Saharan African countries as a whole allocate 11 to 28 per cent of their public resources to education. This means that despite a relatively low per capita Gross Domestic Product, these counties invest a relatively significant amount of resources in education.

3. The quality imperative: ensuring inclusiveness

While the general notion of inclusive education aims at mainstreaming participation of individual learners with special education needs, inclusive quality education reaches out to all and encompasses good teaching, well equipped schools and learning centres, safe schools, enough instruction in the right languages, relevant and useful curriculum and well managed schools. Above all, ensuring a quality education for everyone, not only a few people or in a few places, is a human right. Inclusion is therefore a requirement for quality.

African countries have made significant efforts towards inclusive education, whose key principle is to accommodate all children regardless of their ethnicity and physical, emotional or social conditions, among others. Some African countries stand out clearly in the struggle to achieve this, such as South Africa, the network of inclusive education for East Africa and the nomadic schools project in Nigeria.

4. Ensuring equity in access and quality

Countries in the African continent have the lowest primary enrolment and attendance ratios in the world. Children in many countries do not have as much access to primary education as those in other regions. There is significant meaning in exploring the equity-focused approach in looking at the education sector in the African region. In this regard, economic quintile analyses of school attendance from household surveys show different pattern and trends. For example, Sahelian countries with generally low enrolment ratios show a sharp contrast between the richest quintile and the rest. On the other hand, countries with relatively higher national average enrolments show a sharp contrast between the poorest quintile and the rest with generally higher attendance rates in all groups.

Economic disparity is the strongest factor in schooling, and other factors, such as rural-urban disparity as well as gender disparity, account for inequality. The economic gap and gender and urban/rural disparities interact and intensify disparity. While disadvantaged

children deserve a quality education, the supply of education for them is not always the best. The disparity in the quality of education between the rich and poor is significant.

Social protection strategies and interventions aimed at reducing cost barriers and opportunity costs for households to send their children to school are needed to ensure access to school and quality of learning for those disadvantaged groups. The provision of social protection subsidies, cash and food transfers conditional on enrollment and attendance, free uniforms, textbooks, school materials, transportation, school health, meals and nutrition interventions and scholarships for vulnerable households, as well as direct grants to schools, are examples that help eliminate barriers to schooling. These measures will need to be scaled up to respond to the recent financial and economic crisis, its impact on dwindling international development aid and the mounting pressure on commodity prices, including basic food commodities. These situations impact on the poor and marginalized households whose coping strategies often include pulling their children out of school.

5. Rights-based approach: Reinforcing teacher quality and learning

The right to enjoy all the above mentioned rights is enshrined in a variety of international human rights treaties notably the provisions of articles 26.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 13 of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that reaffirm the right of every one to education based on the principles of inclusion and non-discrimination. Taking a human rights-based approach means carefully planning work so that, for example, the poorest, socially excluded and those who suffer multiple discriminations, are reached. This involves a broad spectrum of people, from community members to grassroots activists to local, national and international NGOs, to trade unions and other civil society actors.

Six areas have been identified as central in the quality debate:

- Appropriate, relevant and inclusive educational aims
- Relevance and breadth in curriculum content
- Actual time available for learning, and its use
- Effective teaching styles
- Appropriate language(s) of instruction
- Regular, reliable and timely assessment, both summative and formative.

With specific reference to African languages, evidence shows their adequate use in education has contributed to improving the quality of teaching and learning through effective communication and interaction that sustain learning with more active participation of learners. UNESCO and ADEA are jointly supporting African governments in the implementation of the policy guide adopted by Ministers of Education in Ouagadougou, for the integration of African languages and cultures in education. The main outcome document of the Bamako+5 meeting on teachers organized by ADEA, in 2009 recommended to governments to adopt inclusive teacher policies that take into account the non formal education (NFE) personnel.

6. Nutrition as a means of enhancing learning outcomes

The meeting will consist of an opening ceremony followed by four plenary sessions, two in the morning and two in the afternoon. The opening will be devoted to a brief introduction of the topic by a distinguished speaker. The first session would address the issue of equity in education, and the second would address education inclusiveness and quality. The third session would be devoted to the presentation of case studies, lessons learned and best practices. The fourth and final session would be a discussion of the main messages and policy recommendations to be transmitted to the 2011 ECOSOC AMR session.