

Challenges of Meeting the MDG Goal on Education

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OVERVIEW

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes Education as a right and that elementary education shall be free and compulsory. The intrinsic value of education is:

- In its ability to add meaning and value to ones life without discrimination.
- In that it has an indispensable means to unlock and protect other human rights.¹

MDG Goal NO 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education. The target specifies that both boys and girls receive a full course of primary schooling (7-8 years) To that effect therefore the gender parity in (enrollment) goal was set for 2005 but has not been achieved by all. Learning/ education according to the UN Chronicle are the heart of development and, consequently the goal contributes to a commitment to dramatically reduce poverty.

Progress so far:

Between 1999 and 2005

- The number of children enrolled in primary school for the first time grew by 4 % from 130 million to 135.²
- In sub-Saharan Africa the increase was by 36%
- Governments have increased their education spending as a result of increased enrolment.
- Overall participation in primary Schooling world wide grew by 6.4 % with the fastest growth registered in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.
- The number of children out of school has dropped sharply from 96Million to 72 million.
- Some countries have developed mechanisms to redistribute funding to disadvantaged or poorer parts of the countries lagging in education either due to economic barriers an the household.

¹ Education For All Monitoring Report 2002.

² UN Chronicle No 4, 2007

- Retention and completion rate in Africa is only 63% compared to the global one which is 87%. Asia is at 79%.

Challenges

- Infrastructure-classroom space did not increase commensurate to enrolment. Some of the schools have classes but no furniture. Others have no rooms so pupils study under trees or in the open. Some teachers commute from far because they do not have housing close to the schools. Teacher attendance in such situations is not guaranteed.
- Teachers are not well remunerated so are not motivated.
- There are no in-service teacher training courses that would have upgraded academic and professional teaching skills especially in science, mathematics and language. (An experiment was once carried out to test teachers on the primary examinations that the pupil taught took and more than half of the teachers scored below average!)
- Teachers too lack teaching guides and texts plus other basic teaching aids.
- Enrolment is only half the story of success.
- Not enough properly trained teachers. For sub-Saharan Africa and Asia combined some 18 million teachers are needed.
- The teacher pupil ratio is 1:100 in general and this compromises quality and knowledge transfer. On average, 40% of the pupils do not attain minimum standards in language and mathematics. (Assessment of 6 years UPE in Uganda-96% not literate or numerate in the rural schools and 56% in urban ones.)³ How to improve quality of teaching and learning. "...To learn to know, how to be, to do and to live to work is the treasure within learning..." Thus the importance of cognitive skills, basic competencies, life skills as well as values and principles."⁴
- Little to no scholastic material. Pupils with better economic means and therefore able to purchase scholastic material consistently perform better.

³ Uganda National Examinations Board 2000.

⁴ UN Chronicle No. 4, 2007.

- School management has not expanded so the day to day running of the schools is wanting.
- No feeding programs.
- There are limited to no sanitation especially for girls and other facilities such as child centered curricular, sufficient hours of instruction (800 a year⁵), this creating an environment that is not safe and healthy.
- There are no special provisions for children that are physically and mentally challenged or those with special psycho-social needs such as HIV/AIDS orphans.

BEST PRACTICE-MALAWI

The country has a UPE and feeding policy that it implements in collaboration with UNICEF. The program is also directly linked to National Food Security.

- Each child gets a hot meal 5 days a week and vulnerable children who attend school 3 consecutive weeks in a row get a half a bag of maize (corn) to take home.
- The country is carrying out research to quantify how the% invested in the education of the girl-child would translate into % of the Gross National (Wealth) Product (GDP)
- The government was able to negotiate and convert a 30 million loan from the World Bank into a grant to finance the setting up of dispensaries in schools to provide vitamin supplements and treatment of common infections and diseases such as malaria. The communities participate in these programs and audit each other.

PROMISE KEEPING MINISTRY

The Anglican Church can, from its Biblical/Ethical understanding, add value to the understanding and seriousness of making and breaking promises. This in itself can catalyze the pace at which governments take UN promises.

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The past years have also produced a generation of children without education, skills, homes and a future. These children have been “born and nurtured” by streets, bushes and verandas. They are captured today, tortured, girls raped and turned into mothers in their teens and into lethal weapons. They are attuned to the music of gunfire from dusk to dawn. They are “comfortable” with guns and explosives.

The MDGs have not created a direct possibility of halting the plight of these children under difficult circumstances: those that are coughed up in conflict, abducted, raped forced into early marriage or turned into child soldiers.

The MDGs must become so powerful and compelling so that the power in the IN THE PROMISE made at the global level can create the political will especially for some governments that do not take **promise keeping as seriously as they take legally binding conventions.**

Yet for the poor, their lives depend on these solemn promises.

What is needed according to Jeffrey Sachs is for us to,

“ ... braced ourselves to face the grim reality of the desperate level of life in the villages of Africa...we need to transcend the MDG mantra and ensure that they are based on National strategies because the real life of MDGs is at the community level.”