

Education and the G7: Time for a global initiative

Education is a key item on the agenda of this year's G7. 125 million children are out of school, and 880 million people can neither read nor write. Governments agree it is a global crisis. They met in Senegal two months ago and promised a renewed effort to provide good quality basic education for all by 2015, including a "global initiative" to mobilize resources. But is this more than hot air? Oxfam is calling on the G8 to launch a Global Action Plan for education and back it with the necessary funds.

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Executive Summary

Education is the single most powerful weapon against poverty. It saves lives. It gives people the chance to improve their lives. It gives them a voice.

But while there is now a strong international consensus that education is vital to poverty reduction, economic growth and democracy, the international community has demonstrated an inability to tackle the education crisis with any conviction. In 1990 world leaders gathered at a conference in Thailand and pledged themselves to rid the world of the scourge of illiteracy. They signed up to a plan that would give every child in the world a good primary education by the year 2000.

They failed. The facts speak for themselves:

- 125 million children never attend school.
- Another 150 million children start primary school but drop out before they learn to read or write.
- Two-thirds of children out of school are girls.
- Sixteen countries in sub-Saharan Africa have suffered a decline in enrolment rates 1990-2000.
- One in four adults in the developing world is illiterate – some 880 million people.

In April world leaders gathered in Dakar, Senegal, to review progress. They affirmed education as a fundamental human right. They set goals of free and compulsory education for all and the halving of adult illiteracy by 2015, the elimination of gender disparities in school by 2005, the extension of learning opportunities for adults and young people, and improvements in all aspects of the quality of education.

The 180 governments at Dakar adopted a Framework for Action with three key elements:

- governments to develop **National Plans of Action** for meeting the education targets.
- recognition that there is a **funding gap**, (estimated at \$8 billion per year by last month's UN Social Summit review in Geneva); affirming "that no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources."
- promise to develop "with immediate effect" a **global initiative** aimed at developing the strategies and mobilising the resources needed to support national efforts.

Launching a Global Action Plan to mobilise the resources, link the resources to good policies, and provide support for the national plans, is the essential first step in making the Dakar promise a reality. But given the failure of governments and the international institutions to tackle the education crisis in the 1990s, Oxfam has grave concerns that the high-flown promises of Dakar might come to nothing.

The Okinawa G7 should do for education what the Cologne G7 did for debt relief: signal serious intent by the world's richest and most powerful nations to confront the crisis with action and resources. The best way to do this would be to launch a Global Action Plan backed by the necessary funding.

Background

In April 2000 180 governments meeting at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal adopted an ambitious Framework for Action aimed at achieving the goal of good quality education for all by 2015. The Framework includes an unequivocal commitment by Northern governments to develop a global initiative to support national efforts. The challenge now is to convert this Framework into meaningful action. What is needed is an international structure capable of mobilising the partnerships, resources and commitment needed to ensure that the early years of the 21st century mark the realisation of the right to education.

The Dakar promise

The Dakar Framework for Action incorporates a collective commitment to education as a basic human right. It recognises that without accelerated progress towards education for all internationally agreed targets for poverty reduction will be missed, and inequalities within countries and between countries will widen. Clear goals have been set. These include free and compulsory education for all and the halving of adult illiteracy by 2015, the elimination of gender disparities in school by 2005, the extension of learning opportunities for adults and young people, and improvements in all aspects of the quality of education.

The Framework for Action includes a strategy for translating these goals into reality. That strategy is based on the following elements:

- **National Plans of Action.** All governments will be requested to prepare national plans of action by 2002 at the latest. Building on existing sector strategies, these plans will set clear budget priorities and identify the policies needed to overcome the special problems facing those excluded from educational opportunities.
- **The principle of ‘adequate financing’.** The international community acknowledges that many countries currently lack the resources to achieve education for all within an acceptable time-frame. The Framework for Action states: “we affirm that no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources.”
- **A global initiative.** In order to support national plans of action and deliver on the collective commitment to adequate financing, the international community will develop “with immediate effect” a global initiative aimed at developing the strategies and mobilising the resources needed to support national efforts.

The development of national action plans will provide an opportunity for Southern governments to express their political commitment to the goals adopted at Dakar. By the same token, the development of a global initiative provides the international community with an opportunity to show that it is capable of backing encouraging words with decisive action – something it failed to do after the 1990 World Conference on Education for All. As the *Financial Times* wrote at the end of the Dakar conference:

“How soon the initiative is delivered, how it will be implemented and how it will be funded, will together prove the acid test of whether a broken promise has been followed by empty words.”

A global initiative

Without an effective global initiative, the ambitious goals set out in the Dakar Framework for Action will not be realised. The Education for All assessment carried out before the conference indicated that at least 113 million children do not go to primary school, and that many countries will not meet the 2015 target of good quality universal education if current trends continue. National efforts hold the key to changing this picture. But national efforts will not succeed without international support.

An effective global initiative must meet three criteria:

- **Resource mobilisation.** International action is needed to close the financing gap that many countries face in achieving education for all.
- **Linking additional resources to good policies.** Mechanisms have to be established for linking increased assistance to policies capable of achieving education for all
- **An early time-frame for implementation.** The Dakar Framework for Action stressed the urgency of accelerating progress towards education for all. This must be reflected in the early development and implementation of a global initiative.

Resource mobilisation

The additional annual cost of achieving universal primary education has been estimated at around \$8bn per annum for ten years. This does not include costs for achieving an extension of adult learning opportunities – and it may understate the costs of combining increased coverage with better quality education at the primary level. Nonetheless, the \$8bn figure provides an indicative target.

The global initiative should aim at mobilising at least \$4bn, with a focus on the poorest countries. The international community should:

- Undertake a time-bound commitment to mobilise \$3bn through increased aid. This increase represents the equivalent of 6per cent of existing aid budgets. It could be achieved through a combination of redistribution within existing aid budgets and increased aid. Debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative could mobilise additional resources.
- Develop innovative partnerships between governments and the private sector to mobilise \$1bn per annum for education for all. To date, international initiatives based on partnerships between the private sector, UN agencies, the World Bank and governments have concentrated on health service provision, with the Global Alliance

for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) being the best known example. There is an urgent need to extend such partnerships to education.

National governments would assume responsibility for mobilising another \$4bn in the context of national action plans. Reduced military expenditure, more equitable spending within the education sector and increased revenue mobilisation are among the obvious financing options.

Linking resources to good policies

There is broad consensus that aid resources must be linked to good policies if sustained progress is to be achieved. It is up to governments to develop appropriate national policy frameworks. But governments that are seriously committed to progress must be able to anticipate increased support. Current approaches suffer both from a lack of coordination between donors and a lack of clarity over eligibility for support, both of which reduce the predictability of support.

The national action planning process could help to resolve these problems. This should integrate education planning into the national poverty reduction strategy, building on existing sectoral approaches. It should also provide a framework for dialogue between government and civil society. National planning could be supported more effectively through national and regional education for all structures. At the same time, donors need to create a more coherent and co-ordinated framework for reviewing national plans, either through the Consultative Group/UNDAF process, or through a designated education for all forum.

Most additional financing will be transmitted through existing aid and debt relief channels. However, the mobilisation of additional private capital will require new mechanisms, including a separate funding arrangement. The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation may provide a possible model. Initially supported by a \$750m grant from a private foundation, GAVI is a broad-based global partnership dedicated to increasing coverage of the six main vaccines, closing the disparity in access to vaccines, and investing in vaccines research. The programme is overseen by a Board, that decides on funding allocations. GAVI is chaired on a rotating basis, with the World Health Organisation holding the post for the first two years, to be followed by UNICEF.

In principle, there is no reason why a global partnership along these lines could not be developed for education. Resources could be allocated through a multilateral framework, with a board chaired on a rotating basis by the convening agencies of the Education for All forum (the World Bank, UNICEF, UNDP and UNESCO). Prominent political figures from North and South could participate in the Boards activity, helping to raise the profile of the initiative.

Precise mechanisms for linking national action plans to additional financing generated through the global initiative need to be developed. However, the key principle is that no viable national action plans should be denied the financial support needed for successful implementation. **Once reviewed and accepted, the national action plan should act as a trigger for automatic entitlement to enhanced financing.**

Time-frame

The Framework for Action adopted at Dakar has helped to restore the credibility of the Education for All movement. Ten years ago, when they met at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, governments adopted ambitious targets, but failed to define clear strategies for achieving them. Following Jomtien, there was a failure of international co-operation, as northern governments and creditors cut aid budgets and allowed the debt crisis to continue. Many national governments also failed to deliver on the commitment made. This background makes it vital that signatories to the Dakar Framework of Action signal their political commitment to early and decisive action.

Southern governments have been requested to develop national action plans by 2002, but the planning process can start immediately. All governments should establish by the end of 2000 a clear schedule and process for developing national plans, including mechanisms for consulting with civil society.

The commitment to ensure that no national plan will fail because of a lack of resources is not backed by a time-frame. This points to an imbalance between the obligations taken on by national governments and those agreed by the international community. For southern governments it also raises the danger that national planning efforts will not be backed by increased support.

Northern governments must act now to establish a clear time-frame for the development of a global initiative. We propose the following two-phased approach:

- **The Okinawa G7 Summit in July 2000.** As the major bilateral donors, the G8 summit should adopt a clear framework and strategy for mobilising resources, along with mechanisms for reviewing progress towards education for all. The summit should do for education what the Cologne G7 summit did for debt relief by sending a clear signal of intent.
- **The annual IMF-World Bank meeting in September 2000.** This provides an opportunity for governments to formally adopt a global initiative on education that includes the financing provisions and mechanisms outlined at the G8 meeting. The initiative would be discussed at both the Development Committee and the International Monetary and Financial Committee.

Oxfam International is a network of eleven aid agencies working in 120 countries throughout the developing world: Oxfam America, Oxfam in Belgium, Oxfam Canada, Community Aid Abroad (Australia), Oxfam Great Britain, Oxfam Hong Kong, Intermon (Spain), Oxfam Ireland, Netherlands Organization for International Development Cooperation (NOVIB), Oxfam New Zealand, and Oxfam Quebec. Please contact any of the agencies for further information.

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