



Education: Tackling the global crisis

Today 125 million children do not get any formal education at all. This education crisis undermines any chance of rapid progress in human development. Oxfam hopes that the Spring Meetings of the World Bank and IMF will see the launch of a global initiative to close the education gap.

April 2001

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Summary

Today 125 million children do not get any formal education at all; the majority of them are girls. Even more children do not get sufficient schooling because they drop out before they learn basic literacy skills. Children throughout the world are being denied their fundamental right to education. In developing countries, one in four adults - some 900 million people, are illiterate. The human costs of this education crisis are incalculable. Rapid progress on Education is essential if any progress is to be made towards meeting the internationally agreed 2015 development targets.

It is possible to overcome this crisis in education. There is an overwhelming consensus between donors, multilateral institutions, and developing countries on the need to turn the tide. The Dakar 'Education for All' conference, exactly one year ago, demonstrated the good will of all the actors to tackle the education crisis. In Dakar, donors agreed to launch a Global Initiative on education to ensure that the necessary resources will be provided to countries who are serious about improving education. But one year later there has been minimal progress and a lack of leadership in co-ordinating international efforts. On current trends there is no chance of meeting the 2005 target for gender equity in education, particularly in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, and the 2015 target for universal primary education will be comprehensively missed, with some 75 million children out of school. If the world is serious about these targets, we need a coherent and concerted multilateral effort.

Oxfam hopes that the Spring Meetings, one year after Dakar, will kick-start progress towards universal primary education and that the Development Committee will show some vitally needed leadership.

Oxfam recommends that:

- **The follow-up of the Dakar World Education Forum and the immediate implementation of the Global Initiative for Education should be high up the Development Committee's agenda.**
- **The Development Committee should endorse the Global Initiative for Education, and ask all the partners, developing countries and donors (bilateral and multilateral) to report back on progress at the annual meetings. This report will reflect how the initiative works and give details for accelerated progress in 30 countries, a first step by the World Bank towards supporting a wider initiative.**
- **James Wolfensohn and Hörst Kohler, together with a small group of supporting Ministers, should publicly announce the launch of a Global Initiative on Education.**

Missing the targets

At the World Conference in Jomtien in 1990, which was held under the auspices of World Bank and UN agencies, goals were set for universal primary education by 2000. At the Social Summit in 1995 the target to reach this goal was put back to 2015 and a new target was introduced for gender equity by 2005.

The 2000 assessment of Education for All¹ shows that there has hardly been any progress. Some individual countries have improved their education policies significantly. In Uganda and Tanzania, funds freed up by debt relief have enabled the government to abolish school fees. Honduras has extended free compulsory public education from six to nine years. Enrolment rates are up in some regions. But far too many children are still out of school, and high quality primary education is a distant dream in most developing countries.

125 million primary school age children are not enrolled in school; two thirds are girls. Of the children who do go to school many only attend for a few years, not enough to learn basic literacy skills. In Least Developed Countries the drop-out rate before 5th grade is 58%. And according to UNESCO 900 million adults are illiterate, 64% of them women.

Illiteracy undermines efforts to improve health and nutrition; efforts to address the causes and impact of HIV/AIDS; efforts to reduce infant and child mortality; efforts to enhance opportunities for more productive livelihoods; and efforts to strengthen democracy, good governance and the achievement of other fundamental rights. Getting on track to meet the education targets will be the key to unlocking and sustaining progress towards the other International Development Targets because of the development dividends that education, particularly girls' education, brings in terms of better health, gender equity, increased productivity and pro poor growth.

The target of universal primary education for all by 2015 is ambitious but still achievable. The world does not lack the resources or the capacity to achieve this goal. What is lacking is the political will and vision needed to accelerate progress. New forms of co-operation are needed to create an enabling environment, including new partnerships between southern and northern governments, and local communities and organisations working with the poor.

A Global Initiative

At the Dakar World Education Forum, held in April 2000, 180 countries showed their commitment to the right of all children to free education by adopting a Framework for Action. The Framework commits developing countries to preparing national action plans by the year 2002. It recognises that many of the poorest countries lack the financing capacity to achieve the goals, and establishes the important principle that 'no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources'. The framework binds the international community to deliver on its collective commitment by 'developing with immediate effect a global initiative aimed at developing the strategies and mobilising the resources needed to provide effective support to national efforts.'²

¹ World Education Report UNESCO 2000

² The Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All. Adopted by the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000

The global vaccines initiative demonstrates the potential for high level political support of multi-stakeholder initiatives in bringing together governments, international institutions, and the private sector. Such initiatives mobilise resources. But just as importantly, they harness political will, and help the proponents of reform, in the South and North, to leverage change in domestic policy priorities. There is good reason to believe that a multi-stakeholder initiative could also work for education.

Oxfam supports a global initiative on education that would:

- **Mobilise resources**

Co-ordinated international action is needed to close the financing gap that many countries will face in achieving education for all. This could build on the proposals of the UK Chancellor and the Italian Finance Minister for a fund for Girl's education. The Global Initiative should broker finances through redistribution within existing aid budgets and increased aid. Debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative could mobilise additional resources, though not at the expense of total ODA volumes. The initiative should also act as a channel for private sector financing and support.

- **Link resources to good policies.**

Increased aid to education should be targeted at countries that are making progress towards developing and implementing good policies on basic education, within wider progress towards pro-poor reforms. The global initiative would create an inventory or ledger that would track each country's progress towards education for all, show where resource gaps exist, and highlight potential support.

- **Build ownership**

The global initiative must be truly global – all actors in the Education For All movement must have ownership, not just the donors. Solutions to the education crisis will still need to be developed through national and sub-national planning processes, and the role of the Global Initiative is to support, not supplant these processes.

- **Guarantee transparency**

Developing countries' national plans and budgetary allocations and donor governments' funding commitments and disbursements should all be publicly and transparently available. Funding gaps should be clearly identified and progress towards filling the gaps tracked for all developing countries. Regular reports should be made to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics and to the OECD DAC according to an agreed monitoring framework that improves the relevance and accuracy of budgetary information.

The need for action at the Spring Meetings

The outcome of Dakar was by no means perfect. But the political vision and leadership articulated by James Wolfensohn, Kofi Annan, and others raised hopes. At consecutive high level summits in the summer of 2000, world leaders pledged their support to meeting the education for all targets. But this rhetoric has not been matched by actions.

Without a global initiative, the momentum generated at Dakar will lead only to islands of excellence, and the 2005 and 2015 targets will be missed. The Spring Meetings, one year after Dakar, represent a critical moment for action if the opportunity generated at Dakar is not to be lost. We hope that the Development Committee will show some vitally needed leadership.

Oxfam recommends that:

- The follow-up of the Dakar World Education Forum and the immediate implementation of the Global Initiative for Education should be high up the Development Committee's agenda.
- The Development Committee should endorse the Global Initiative for Education, and ask all the partners, developing countries and donors (bilateral and multilateral) to report back on progress at the annual meetings. This report will reflect how the initiative works and give details for accelerated progress in 30 countries, a first step by the World Bank towards supporting a wider initiative.
- James Wolfensohn and Hörst Kohler, together with a small group of supporting Ministers, should publicly announce the launch of a Global Initiative on Education.

Oxfam International is a network of eleven aid agencies that work in 120 countries throughout the developing world: Oxfam America, Oxfam in Belgium, Oxfam Canada, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad (Australia), Oxfam GB, Oxfam Hong Kong, Intermon Oxfam (Spain), Oxfam Ireland, Novib, Oxfam New Zealand, and Oxfam Quebec. Please call or write to any of the agencies for further information.

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