



DRAFT

Background Paper^{*}

**“Imperative for Quality Education for All in Africa:
Ensuring equity and enhancing teaching quality”**

prepared for the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review (AMR)
Regional Preparatory Meeting for Africa

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

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1. Summary

Since the adoption of the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals in 2000, access to education has increased significantly throughout all sub-regions of Africa. Many countries are on track to achieve Universal Primary Education and gender equality in education by 2015. Despite this encouraging news, progress in Africa is threatened by slower economic growth, reduced public and international expenditure on education, and by the complex demands placed on systems struggling to cope with increased enrollment. In addition, hidden within positive enrollment data is the disturbing trend that far too many students are repeating grades and not completing primary education, thereby putting enormous financial and physical demands on schools and systems, and adversely affecting learning outcomes of older children. Without simultaneously addressing issues related to education quality, including significantly increasing the number of effectively trained and remunerated teachers, and ensuring that education resources prioritize the most vulnerable and underserved, schools and classrooms will continue to be overcrowded, drop-out and repetition rates, especially for the poorest children, will remain high, and real learning, measured by the development of core competencies, including literacy, numeracy, and life skills, will not be achieved.

The situation in Africa today is hopeful, more girls and boys are going to school than ever before and massive “go to school” campaigns have proven successful. However, amidst determined efforts by governments, as of 2007, 32 million children in sub-Saharan Africa remained unenrolled, and in 2008, an estimated 29 million children across the continent were not enrolled.¹ These figures highlight the reality that much work remains to be done for Africa to reach the 2015 goals and targets. Positive enrollment figures, although encouraging, obscure the fact that significant populations of children and youth remain totally excluded from education, and due to the low quality of teaching and learning, many students fail to present progress through primary education, due to drop-outs and grade repetition.

Through concerted efforts at national and sub-regional levels, made possible by better coordinated long-term strategies and responses, including the adoption of a Sector Wide Approach (SWAp)², and the abolition of primary school fees in all countries, with the exception of Namibia, Somalia, and Zimbabwe, Africa is generally performing well against the internationally established education targets within MDG 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education. The main area of progress has been in net primary education enrollment. In addition, in line with EFA targets, access to early childhood education and to secondary education has also improved across the continent, albeit from low baseline levels. Although gender disparities remain deeply ingrained, a majority of countries are making progress towards achieving gender parity in primary education by 2015. According to the report *Assessing Progress in Africa toward the Millennium Development Goals for 2010*:

‘Of the 27 countries with data for 1991 and 2007, seven countries (Ethiopia, Guinea, Malawi, Mali, Madagascar, Mauritania, and Morocco), scored a significant improvement of 30 to 50 percentage points. Burkina Faso, Burundi, Djibouti, The Gambia, Ghana, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Swaziland, and Togo also succeeded in improving primary net enrollment by some 10 to 30 percentage points during this period.’³

Despite this encouraging trend, some countries, including three of the five most populated of the continent (Nigeria - 1st, Democratic Republic of Congo - 4th and South Africa – 5th), have shown

¹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) 2010.

² Includes sector plans with evidence-based equity strategies endorsed by the Fast-Track Initiative, in lieu of a SWAp.

³ *Assessing Progress in Africa Towards the MDGs*, MDG Report 2010, pages 14- 15.

declining enrollment over the same period even though education is free and compulsory. Nigeria is home to the largest number of out of school children in the world, 8.8 million in 2008.⁴ In North Africa, four countries, Sudan, Morocco, Mauritania and, to a lesser extent, Egypt, face critical challenges in terms of access, and are not on track to achieve Universal Primary Education.⁵

In order to achieve Education for All and gender equality in education by 2015, among other milestones, targeted measures need to be taken and resources prioritized for the poorest of the poor and most marginalized communities, including orphans and vulnerable children, those in rural areas, pastoralists, ethnic minorities, children with disabilities, and those affected by natural disasters and conflict. Broad-based commitment needs to be made by governments, donors, and other education partners over the next four years to ensure the following objectives are realized:

- 1) Inclusion of the most vulnerable children and youth, the so-called “last 10 to 15 percent” of the population who are totally excluded from the education system.
- 2) Ensure equal opportunities and access to education in areas where large gender disparities remain.
- 3) Improve the primary school completion rate, by addressing the causes of student drop-outs.
- 4) Enhance the quality and relevance of education so that all children achieve meaningful learning outcomes.

This paper will attempt to demonstrate that the most significant underlying causes for the current shortcomings and challenges to education in Africa are due to the lack of equity in the delivery of education services, which overwhelmingly affects poor and marginalized populations, and the low quality of education, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, which affects retention and learning outcomes, and contributes to grade repetition. Following a review of Africa’s progress towards achieving the EFA and the Millennium Development Goals and targets, innovative and relevant strategies, proven to be effective in increasing equity in the delivery of education services and improving the quality of teaching and learning, will be presented as options for going forward.

2. Background and Rationale

a. Purpose of the ECOSOC Ministerial meeting

The ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) was established in 2005 to track progress and strengthen efforts towards the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals, by the target date of 2015.⁶ The first AMR was held in July 2007 and focused on poverty and hunger (MDG 1). The 2008 AMR session focused on sustainable development (MDG 7), followed by health (MDGs 4, 5, 6) in 2009, and gender (MDG 3) in 2010. The theme for 2011 is "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to education" (MDGs 2 and 3). The 2011 Africa Regional Consultation will build on the success of the 2010 AMR which refocused attention on gender equity and girls' education and strengthened the links between MDGs 2 and 3. The 2011 AMR for Africa will provide an unprecedented opportunity to review progress against the EFA and MDG 2 targets, advocate for greater investment in education, and ensure action is taken now to improve teaching quality and promote the inclusion of the most marginalized children and youth. Without this

⁴ UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report, MDG 2010 background note, page 2.

⁵ Third Arab Report on the MDGs 2010 and the Impact of the Global Economic Crisis, page 33.

⁶ General Assembly resolution A/RES/61/16, of 20 November 2006, entitled “*Strengthening of the Economic and Social Council*”) provides general guidance on the AMR.

reprioritization and scaling-up of innovative practices across Africa, the significant gains achieved in net enrollment and access to education will be undermined, and 2015 targets will not be met.

b. Why the double focus of equity and education quality?

In order to sustainably achieve EFA and MDGs 2 and 3, a double focus on equity and education quality, including teaching, is required. Innovative strategies which promote enrollment and the increased retention of students need to be scaled-up in the most underserved communities. At the same time, the quality of teaching and learning needs to improve and disparities in learning outcomes addressed to mitigate student drop-outs so that primary school graduates acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and values to become productive and active members of their community. Increased retention and improved school completion rates will also help to ensure that a greater number of students continue their education through secondary and tertiary levels, a prerequisite for Africa to be competitive in the global economy.

The double focus on equity and improved teaching and learning reaffirms the right of all children, regardless of socio-economic status, religion, health, gender, race, and geographic origin, among other factors, to quality education. This right is enshrined in a variety of international human rights treaties, including 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 of the Rights of the Child. Quality education encompasses effective teaching, well-equipped, safe schools, relevant curriculum and functional school management. Quality education is dependent on well-trained, motivated, and effective teachers who are respected by their students and the community. The concept of quality education is necessarily dynamic and rights-based. It entails democratic citizenship and solidarity as important outcomes. Education for human rights and sustainable development are essential components of the right to quality education, of which teacher quality is a key part. Quality education should be accessible for all, not just for children of the elite or for those in large towns – indeed it is for the poor and disadvantaged that quality education will make the biggest difference. Inclusive, equity-based education and teaching quality are inextricably linked to a right-based approach. A right-based school is effective and child-friendly, and functions within a system which is capable of identifying excluded children and reaching out to include them.

According to a recently released report entitled *Narrowing the Gaps to Meet the Goals* (UNICEF, 7 September 2010), the most practical and cost-effective way of meeting the MDGs is by using an equity-based approach. By scaling up maternal and child health interventions at the community level, and by focusing on the most marginalized populations, the data clearly indicates that the additional investment required is more than offset by the significant gains made in under five mortality. There is increasing belief that this model could also apply to education interventions, including use of vouchers and/or scholarships for girls and marginalized students, social protection measures for orphans and other vulnerable children, school feeding, physical improvements in schools to promote inclusive education for children with disabilities, scaling-up of early childhood care and education, and other approaches which will be discussed later.

c. Expected outcomes

The ECOSOC AMR for Africa is expected to have the following main outcomes:

- 1) Provide an assessment of how African countries are doing in relation to the achievement of EFA and MDGs 2 and 3;

- 2) Highlight the strong links between education and the other internationally agreed development goals/MDGs;
- 3) Serve as a catalyst for the realization of the education goals by introducing new strategies and approaches, including the reprioritization of resources for the most marginalized;
- 4) Encourage countries to launch initiatives in support of education at the Substantive Session and the eventual drafting of a General Assembly resolution on education;
- 5) Achieve broad multi-stakeholder engagement and mobilization of additional donor and African government resources for education, including the promotion of new North-South and South-South partnerships.

3. EFA by 2015: Where do African countries stand?

a. Education, investment and socio-economic development

Education is a basic right of all children and has links to all six Millennium Development Goals. It is the most wide-reaching requirement for alleviating poverty, improving health outcomes and quality of life, reducing gender and social disparities, as well as ensuring environmental sustainability. Education contributes to economic growth and poverty reduction because it develops cognitive and life skills, including literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking, thereby enhancing an individual's livelihood prospects. According to the African Child Policy Forum, it is estimated that 'one additional year of education per person results, on average, in 6 percent per capita GDP growth'.⁷ At the level of the individual, a single year of primary school increases wages earned later in life by 5 – 15 percent. For each additional year of secondary school, a person's wages increase by 15 – 25 percent.⁸ The benefits of additional years of schooling are even more significant for girls and women, contributing to high social and economic returns for their families and communities. Appropriate education also contributes to conflict prevention and resolution and the development of good governance and participation in key decision-making processes.

World-wide, the average number of years of education per person is 9.2 (primary plus secondary). This level is achieved, and even surpassed, by a few African countries, primarily in North Africa. However, a child in sub-Saharan Africa can expect to receive, on average, five to six fewer years of schooling than a child in Western Europe or the Americas.⁹ It is imperative for Africa to not just achieve Universal Primary Education, but to keep children and youth in school for as long as possible beyond the primary grades, increasing the number receiving secondary certificates and tertiary degrees. Governments and donors need to embrace the premise that the additional investment required to keep children and youth in school will, in the long-term, be offset by resultant increases in per capita GDP growth. A conceptual shift is needed: resources committed to education are an investment in the future of the individual, as well as an investment towards national development goals and aspirations, not "aid" or "expenditures on unproductive sectors". According to the UNESCO *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010*, sub-Saharan African countries spend roughly \$167 per child per year in primary education, compared to over \$1,000 globally and more than \$5,000 in the United States and Western Europe. Although investment levels vary greatly across Africa, per child spending on education must increase significantly.

⁷ African Child Policy Forum fact sheet "*Investing in Education: A Pathway to Development*", page 1.

⁸ Global Campaign for Education 2010

⁹ UNESCO *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2005*, executive summary, page 2

The continuing trend of declining public expenditure on primary education (as a percent of overall budget, as well as in comparison with other education sub-sectors), due to the global economic crisis, shifting national priorities, and the failure of donors to make good on pledges and commitments to education¹⁰, suggests that unless new strategies are developed, the additional resources and resolve required to reach those children still out of school will be difficult or impossible to mobilize. International donors also need to be reminded of commitments made as part of The Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action. Alignment and harmonization were supposed to lead to more predictable/longer-term funding for education, underscored by the EFA promise that no country will be prevented from achieving Education for All due to lack of resources, provided that full commitment is demonstrated by the country itself. This level of commitment has yet to be realized, while data on the importance of investment in primary education is unequivocal:

‘...the countries which allocate at least 50 percent of their education budget to primary education reported the fastest rate of progress on this target in 2007 relative to 1991. Mauritania, for example, increased its primary enrollment rate from about 38 percent in 1991 to 81 percent in 2007, Niger from about 28 percent in 1991 to 46 percent in 2007, and Burkina Faso from about 30 percent in 1991 to 53 percent in 2007.’¹¹

Given the limited resources available to education, an equity-based approach needs to be adopted to accelerate progress against the 2015 targets. Article 4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child requires governments to undertake measures aimed at meeting children’s rights ‘to the maximum extent of their available resources’. The assumption that it is not cost effective to reach the millions of excluded children, for example in rural areas, or those living in nomadic populations, needs to be re-examined from both a rights-based and broader development perspective. According to the latest research by UNICEF, UNESCO, and other organizations, in order to maximize impact within the current global economic climate, ‘judicious use of available resources to spur progress towards the MDGs with equity is imperative. Approaches with a strong focus on the poorest and most deprived children, and on proven, cost-effective measures to reduce the barriers they face in accessing and using essential services, are appropriate for these times.’¹²

b. Overview of progress made in the region

In 2000, 164 governments adopted the Dakar Education for All Declaration which included a target for African countries to allocate at least seven percent of their GDP to education by 2005, and nine percent by 2010. The six countries (Botswana, Djibouti, Kenya, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Tunisia) that have achieved the nine percent allocation target should be commended for their perseverance despite the challenging economic climate, and the achievement of Lesotho, which leads all other African countries with spending on education at 13 percent of its GDP, should be highlighted. Although still short of the EFA target, Uganda increased its budget for education by almost two-thirds between 2000-2008, while Mali, Mozambique, Rwanda and Senegal raised theirs by 53-73 percent in the same period.¹³ Clearly, sustainable progress in education in Africa is not possible unless national governments take on an increasing share of responsibility for the costs associated with scaling-up access, including for school construction, provision of teaching and learning supplies, and for teacher salaries and training and other recurrent costs.

¹⁰ UNESCO press release, 19 January 2010, among several factors, cites the underperformance and very low payout rates of the Fast Track Initiative, the center piece of multilateral aid for education.

¹¹ Assessing Progress in Africa Towards the Millennium Development Goals, MDG Report 2010, pages 15-16.

¹² UNICEF “*Narrowing the Gaps to Meet the Goals*”, page 7

¹³ African Child Policy Forum fact sheet “*Investing in Education: A Pathway to Development*”, page 1.

Another area of significant progress has been the development of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) within which education budgetary priorities have been set and endorsed by national governments and donors. As a result, the quality of planning has improved, and more equitable, realistic and cost-effective education budgets have been developed. Education planning has also made increased use of sector-wide information, and with very few exceptions, almost all countries across Africa are currently using Education Management Information Systems (EMIS).¹⁴ Ideally, an EMIS creates linkages between central level authorities with regional, district, and school levels, leading to improved planning, increased organizational efficiency, more reliable data and analysis, and better information sharing and transparency within the sector. In combination, a PRSP developed in consultation with education stakeholders, and an effective, accurate EMIS, will help African countries meet objectives related to EFA and MDGs 2 and 3.¹⁵

Since 2000 the continent as a whole has made significant, though uneven, progress towards the achievement of the six Education for All Goals:¹⁶

Goal 1 - Expand early childhood care and education

Although the gross pre-school enrollment ratio has increased from 12 percent in 2000 to 17 percent in 2008, the vast majority of pre-primary school-age children do not have access to education. There are great disparities in access to early childhood education across the continent, and in many countries, ECE is provided by the private sector and concentrated in urban areas.

Goal 2 – Provide free and compulsory primary education for all

The net enrollment ratio for primary education increased from 56 percent in 1999 to 73 percent in 2007.¹⁷ The primary school completion rate increased from 43 percent to 64 percent in the same period, however, the data clearly demonstrates that children from rural areas and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are disadvantaged. Only five countries achieved a primary school completion rate higher than 95 percent in 2008. If the primary education trends remain the same, only 22 countries are likely to achieve Universal Primary Education by 2015.

Goal 3 – Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults

In 2000, 277 pupils per 100,000 (from 18 countries in sub-Saharan Africa where data was available) were enrolled in technical and vocational education and training (TVET). In 2008, this figure increased to 408 per 100,000, however, the percentage of TVET enrollment in secondary education fell from 9 percent in 2000 to 7 percent in 2008, most likely as a result of the increases in secondary enrollment due to primary education completion gains. This data indicates that many young people in Africa enter the workforce without adequate technical and vocational training.

Goal 4 - Increase adult literacy by 50 percent

The goal of increasing adult literacy by 50 percent will not be achieved by 2015. Despite the efforts of governments and partners, there are still 153 million illiterate adults in Africa today, two thirds of whom are women, representing 20 percent of the global total (759 million). Some African governments, through the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment, have taken steps to boost the development of this sub-sector, but the problem of adult illiteracy in Africa has yet to receive the attention it requires.

Goal 5 - Achieve gender parity by 2005, gender equality by 2015

¹⁴ UNDG Task Force on the MDG, 'Thematic paper on MDG 2'.

¹⁵ The World Bank, infoDev, <http://www.infodev.org>.

¹⁶ UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2010.

¹⁷ UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2010

The expansion of the education systems since 2000, has favored girls' enrollment, especially at the primary level. However, in 2008, parity between boys and girls was not yet achieved in sub-Saharan Africa, with 91 girls enrolled in primary school for 100 boys and only 84 girls enrolled in junior secondary school for 100 boys, with significant disparities across sub-regions. There are major challenges to increasing girls' enrollment and retention, including poverty, traditional and cultural practices, teachers' attitudes, and negative gender stereotypes in textbooks.

Goal 6 - Improve the quality of education

In some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, up to 40 percent of young people who have attended primary school for five years have neither the essential basic skills to avoid lapsing into illiteracy, nor the minimal qualifications to secure a job. These are alarming indications of the overall low level of education quality in many parts of Africa. One of the responses to this challenge was the adoption by African governments of the Basic Education for Africa Program (BEAP). The BEAP introduced the concept of basic education going beyond primary school and lasting between 9 and 10 years, taking into consideration the realities of the African context and the development needs of children. For the BEAP to be successful, curricula reform, teacher training and support for teachers, including adequate remuneration, and other system wide improvements must take place.

c. Highlights of successful approaches towards achieving EFA

It is no surprise that the greatest obstacle to education for the poorest children and their families are the direct as well as indirect costs associated with going to school. Even in countries where primary and secondary school fees have been abolished, many parents or caregivers cannot send their children to school because of the opportunity costs related to education (often, unfortunately, the loss of child labor to benefit the household), as well as the direct costs related to uniforms, school supplies/textbooks, transportation, and meals. Financial constraints - or inability to make the required payments and sacrifice to send a child to school - affect large families more than small ones and girls more than boys. However, in addition to increasing public expenditure on education and abolishing school fees, many governments have taken highly effective measures including:

'...(reducing) or altogether removing the burden of schooling costs on households...by providing compensatory grants to schools and...introducing more accessible forms of schooling, such as community schools, mobile schools, distance learning, and through contracting out their responsibilities to NGOs. Both of these approaches are important steps to increase the access of education for poor and marginalized learners.'¹⁸

Other examples of some of the most effective measures to reduce financial barriers to education include scholarships for girls for secondary education and boarding schools for pastoralist girls, as well as the recent development of "talent academies" for out of school youth. Cash transfers are also becoming an increasingly common measure to enhance enrollment in sub-Saharan Africa, including the Basic Education Assistance Module, which focuses on vulnerable children in Zimbabwe, while SADC, with the support of the UN and other partners, is developing a Care and Support Strategy for OVC and Youth in its member states. In several North African countries, rural communities benefit from school feeding programs which have helped to increase enrollment and improve completion rates. In Tunisia and Algeria, scholarship programs established in the 1970s encourage children from poor families to continue their education through secondary level, and secondary schools in rural areas were equipped with dormitories to host children from remote communities, who would otherwise be unable to travel to school on a daily basis.

¹⁸ UNDG Task Force on the MDG, 'Thematic paper on MDG 2'.

Of the many African countries which have made significant strides in increasing primary enrollment, two examples, Tanzania and Somalia, deserve attention. Through well coordinated efforts, relying heavily on strong community mobilization, promotion of girl's education, and innovative strategies to eliminate or reduce the burden of school fees, it has been possible to enroll and retain massive numbers of out of school children, even in Somalia, which has suffered from 20 years of civil conflict, an absence of central government, and recurrent natural disasters. In the case of Tanzania, NER increased from 50 percent to 98 percent between 1999 and 2007.¹⁹ In Somalia, from 2000 - 2006/07, total primary school enrollment increased by roughly 300 percent²⁰, and over the past two school years, an additional 322,344 students (38 percent girls) have been enrolled in temporary and permanent schools, including in Mogadishu.²¹

Over the past decade there has been an increasing commitment to early childhood education (ECE) across the continent. In East and Southern Africa enrollment rates in pre-primary education now average 25 percent across the sub-region with rates as high as 77 percent in South Africa and 58 percent in Kenya. Meanwhile, there have also been sustained efforts to strengthen community-based approaches to ECE and parental education which may be more cost-effective alternatives. The main challenge is to adhere to the equity-based approach and ensure access for the most vulnerable children rather than increase inequalities by improving access to private ECE facilities (pre-schools and kindergartens) in relatively well-off communities. Malawi has addressed this issue through the use of targeted cash transfers for the poorest and most vulnerable.

Although results are mixed across the continent, the latest data available (2008) indicates that countries in Africa continue to make progress towards gender parity in education. The reasons for this include successful community-led school enrollment campaigns targeting out of school girls, financial packages, including vouchers and the alleviation of school fees, and, most importantly, changing attitudes about the importance of education. Today, it is increasingly understood that girls' education contributes to increased economic productivity, both at the household and national levels, positive health outcomes, including reduced infant and maternal mortality, improved nutrition and health awareness, HIV/AIDS prevention, lower fertility rates, and reduced gender-based inequalities and violence against girls and women.²² However, these important messages need to continue to be disseminated by governments and education partners through all levels of administration, as well as to the community level, to ensure that gender equality in education is permanently achieved. In addition, efforts to strengthen girls' education should not obscure the fact that in some countries, in particular in Southern Africa, boys are becoming increasingly disillusioned with education and are dropping out more rapidly than girls.

From 1999 through 2007, the primary education Gender Parity Index (GPI), which measures the relative access to education of males and females, improved from 0.89 (or the equivalent of 89 female primary students per 100 male students) in sub-Saharan Africa and 0.90 in Arab States (including North Africa) to 0.93 and 0.92. In North Africa, Morocco and Mauritania achieved notable success in gender parity, and from 1999 to 2007 their GPIs improved from 0.85 and 0.99 to 0.95 and 1.07 respectively.²³ Despite this positive development, the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) warns that:

¹⁹ UNDG Task Force on the MDGs, 'Thematic paper on MDG 2'.

²⁰ UNICEF Somalia 2006/07 Primary Education Survey.

²¹ Includes unverified enrollment data provided by the Ministries of Education; total enrollment for 2010/11 is expected to decrease due to dropouts; in 2006/07 total girl student enrollment was roughly 33 percent.

²² UNGEI at 10: A Journey to Gender Equality in Education, page 9.

²³ Third Arab Report on the MDGs 2010 and the Impact of the Global Economic Crisis, page 26; a GPI > 1, indicates that more girls are enrolled than boys, which is also problematic.

'The number of out-of-school children in sub-Saharan Africa is alarming, especially considering the fact that the population is markedly smaller than, for instance, in South and West Asia, the region with the second largest number of out-of-school children. In sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of out-of-school girls has remained the same, at 54 percent, between 1999 and 2007, another disturbing trend.'²⁴

Although important progress has been made, the figures cited above translate into more than 20 million primary school age girls out of school in sub-Saharan Africa, and almost 4 million in North Africa. Furthermore, the Gender Parity Index as a stand-alone indicator can be deceiving. The GPI for the net enrollment is 1.00 across East and Southern Africa, i.e. gender parity appears to have been achieved, while the GPI for the gross enrollment (which includes children older than the grade that they should be enrolled in) indicates more boys are enrolled and attending school than girls. In addition, the GPI for secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa was estimated to be only 0.79 in 2007²⁵, indicating significant room for improvement, however, this may be due to higher repetition rates for boys than girls²⁶. In primary and secondary education in West Africa, The Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, and Senegal have made the greatest progress in achieving gender parity. In tertiary education, although data is scant, North Africa continues to lead the continent, as Tunisia and Algeria have significantly surpassed gender parity targets for females, to the extent that more women than men are enrolled in universities and colleges.²⁷ While there has been much success in addressing gender parity, large gaps remain in certain countries, e.g. in Angola, Eritrea, and Somalia. At the other extreme, there are worrying recent disparities in favor of girls in some countries in Southern Africa, including South Africa due to boys' disaffection and drop-out.

In Southern and Eastern Africa, five countries (Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Swaziland, and Tanzania) involved in the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) demonstrated significant improvements in reading and mathematics tests scores between 2000 and 2007. This achievement correlates with an improving quality of teaching and learning, which in turn contributes to increased student retention, better progression rates, and improved learning outcomes. Only one country in SACMEQ, Mozambique, registered a significant deterioration in both reading and mathematics scores, which were most likely the result of massive increases in enrollments without requisite increases in material resources and teachers to support schools. According to SACMEQ, the case of Mozambique 'highlights the EFA challenge for all countries to strike a balance between increases in enrollment and improvements in the quality of education for all'.²⁸ SACMEQ demonstrates the need for greater focus on quality throughout the sub-region as only 57 percent and 25 percent of children attained minimal scores in reading and mathematics respectively, with far fewer achieving desirable levels. SACMEQ 2007 also showed that children's knowledge of HIV/AIDS was very low across the region, with few exceptions, the most notable being Tanzania and Swaziland. This suggests that many children can complete a full cycle of primary education with negligible learning outcomes and that much more must be done to enhance the quality of education and reduce inequalities in learning outcomes.

African countries continue to make progress against MDG indicator 2.3, improving the literacy rate amongst youth (15 to 24 year olds). In 2007, eight countries (Cape Verde, Gabon, Libya, Mauritius, São Tomé and Príncipe, South Africa, Tunisia and Zimbabwe) were less than five

²⁴ UNGEI at 10: A Journey to Gender Equality in Education, page 11.

²⁵ Ibid, pages 11 and 13.

²⁶ Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE), www.create-rpc.org

²⁷ Assessing Progress in Africa Towards the Millennium Development Goals, MDG Report 2010, page 21.

²⁸ SACMEQ Policy Issues Series, Number 2, September 2010.

percentage points from achieving the target of 100 percent youth literacy²⁹, with another four countries less than 10 percentage points away. Unfortunately, 11 countries out of the 32 for which there are data (Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal, and Sierra Leone) have recorded disappointingly low youth literacy rates between 72 and 37 percent, making it highly unlikely that they will achieve the 100 percent target by 2015.³⁰ Without greater efforts, illiterate youth will struggle to engage in productive livelihoods, will not be able to adequately provide for themselves or their families, be less likely to have basic knowledge about HIV/AIDS and its prevention, and will become increasingly at risk for recruitment into militias (in conflict-affected countries) or criminal activity. In addition, it is widely accepted that additional years of quality primary and secondary education contribute to a young person's understanding of peace, tolerance, and human rights³¹, inarguable prerequisites for security and development.

d. Review of persisting gaps

African governments, donors, and education partners need to recognize that significant challenges still exist towards achieving EFA and MDGs 2 and 3, and unless these are addressed, the 2015 targets will not be met. More importantly, unless structural changes are made now, the future prospects for millions of poor and otherwise marginalized children and youth across the continent will remain limited, making them economic burdens rather than contributors to their society. For the continent as a whole, **the single biggest drain on limited education resources and warning that countries are not on track to achieve EFA and MDG2, is the low primary school completion rate.** To address the current challenges in education in Africa, special attention must be given to ensure the inclusion of the most vulnerable children and youth, the increased enrollment and retention of girls, and the overall improvement of the quality of teaching and learning, with a focus on the importance of the teacher.

Low primary school completion rates put enormous financial constraints on already over-burdened education systems, and unless addressed, Africa will be unable to meet the 2015 goals and targets. According to some estimates, as many as one out of three children who enroll in primary school drop-out before completing Grade 8.³² In addition, there are eight countries (Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Eritrea, and Niger) with primary completion rates of less than 50 percent, i.e. more children in these countries eventually drop out of primary school than complete Grade 8.³³ Although not an official MDG indicator, completion rates are a proxy indicator for measuring education quality. It is widely accepted that parents, and students themselves, will make enormous sacrifices and take on significant financial burden to send their children to school - if they appreciate the quality of teaching and learning being offered. Parents with limited financial means may not send their children to school, if the classroom lacks furniture, school supplies and textbooks, or if they perceive that the quality and motivation of the teacher (in many cases even the physical presence) are lacking. Children and youth who must contribute to the family income through casual labor/menial jobs, or who have to take care of younger siblings, will likewise not be inclined to further compromise their family's precarious financial situation if attending school has limited or no value.

²⁹ The indicator is defined as the percentage of people aged 15 -24 who can, with understanding, both read and write a short, simple statement related to their everyday life.

³⁰ Assessing Progress in Africa Towards the Millennium Development Goals, MDG Report 2010, pages 19-20 and the World Bank Ed Stats Newsletter, August 2010, page 5.

³¹ UNDG Task Force on the MDG, 'Thematic paper on MDG 2'.

³² UNDG Task Force on the MDG, 'Thematic paper on MDG 2'.

³³ UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Ed Stats, August 2010.

North African countries are performing better on primary school completion rates than those in sub-Saharan Africa. The highest survival rate to the last grade of primary education is in Egypt with 97 percent, followed by Tunisia and Algeria with 94 percent and 93 percent respectively. However, primary school completion rates reach only 82 percent and 76 percent respectively in Mauritania and Morocco. In three of the five North African countries, the GPI for the survival rate is greater than 1 showing a slight advantage for girls; in Morocco the GPI is 0.99, while data is not gender disaggregated for Egypt. In East and Southern Africa, primary school completion rates vary widely from 87 percent in Botswana, followed by Kenya at 84 percent and Tanzania at 83 percent to only 32 percent in Uganda, with an average across the sub-region of only 55 percent.

School completion rates give an approximate measure of the internal efficiency and effectiveness of an education system, and can help guide education authorities to identify and address the causes of student drop-outs and poor retention. This is critical because the ultimate goal of Education for All is to not just have children enrolled in school, but attending on a consistent basis, completing grade levels, successfully passing Grade 8 (or equivalent) level exams, and ideally progressing on to secondary and tertiary education. Although a majority of countries with data available demonstrated improvements in primary completion rates from 1991 to 2007, Algeria, Chad, Eritrea, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, São Tomé and Príncipe, the Seychelles, Senegal, South Africa, and Togo regressed from 2005 to 2007.³⁴ High primary school completion rates are essential for the ‘...scaling-up of investment, both public and private, in the provision of primary education,’ furthermore investment in education, ‘is more clearly justified when the children enrolled at school stay on to complete their studies.’³⁵

Children from the poorest families, especially in rural areas, are at greatest risk of remaining poor throughout their lifetimes and will continue to lack access to basic social services, including education. Unless these significant social disadvantages are addressed through an equity-based approach, the “last 10 to 15 percent” of the population will remain on the margins. Many of these children and youth cannot go to school because they are forced to contribute to the family's income, struggling to provide for their siblings' well-being as de facto heads of households (in the case of orphans, or when a parent is too ill to work because of HIV/AIDS). Others affected by disabilities lack the physical and financial assistance required to allow them to go to school, or are confronted by schools which are completely inaccessible. Street children and youth are often ignored altogether, a blight on the urban landscape, better hidden or rounded up by police, rather than cared for. And many others from extremely remote areas cannot go to school because there is no school at all in their community. According to UNICEF, data from 43 developing countries clearly illustrates the disparities in access to education between children in rich and poor households, and between areas of residence:

‘The lowest rates of primary school participation are in sub-Saharan Africa, where only 65 percent of primary school-aged children are in school. Children from the poorest 20 percent of households are less likely to attend primary school than children from the richest 20 percent...Disparities based on household wealth vary widely...In Liberia, children from the richest households are 3.5 times more likely to attend primary school as children from the poorest households...Disparities based on area of residence are also marked. In 43 countries with available data, 86 percent of urban children attend primary school, compared to only 72 percent of rural children. The largest disparities can be seen in Liberia and Niger, where urban children are twice as likely as rural children to attend primary school.’³⁶

³⁴ Assessing Progress in Africa Towards the Millennium Development Goals, MDG Report 2010, page 18.

³⁵ Assessing Progress in Africa Towards the Millennium Development Goals, MDG Report 2010, page 16.

³⁶ UNICEF, Progress for Children: Achieving the MDGs with Equity, Number 9, September 2010, page 18; data includes developing countries within and outside of Africa.

Inequities are also increased due to variable access to teacher training and to the skewed deployment of teachers in favor of urban areas, further compromising education quality and learning outcomes in poor and rural communities, or in regions/districts marginalized because of geography, ethnicity, religion, and/or conflict. In Sudan gross disparities exist between the training level and quality of teachers in the North and in the South. According to some estimates, in South Sudan only 13 percent of an estimated 23,000 teachers have been trained, while in the North, 60 percent of teachers have been trained, with significant disparities between states. Across the continent, trained teachers are overwhelmingly concentrated in capitals or large towns which offer a relatively better quality of life, while rural schools rely on semi-trained or un-trained teachers.

The importance of increasing girls' access to education, and retention, cannot be overstated, however, corrective measures which may be detrimental to the enrollment and retention of boys are also of concern. The Gender Parity Index for youth literacy, or the ratio of literate female youth to literate male youth, provides a measurement of the effectiveness of primary education for girls, in terms of the development of literacy skills. The seven countries with the lowest GPIs for youth literacy in the world are in sub-Saharan Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, and Sierra Leone), with Niger bottoming out at 0.44 (i.e. 44 literate female youth per 100 literate male youth). In terms of GPI for gross enrollment in primary education, seven African countries (Angola, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Niger, and Somalia) rank among the ten lowest in the world, with Somalia the lowest at 0.55. The GPI for secondary education is even worse, with nine African countries (Central African Republic, Chad, Congo DRC, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Togo) among the ten lowest in the world, with Chad second-worst, after Afghanistan, at 0.45.³⁷

In addition to the positive economic and health related outcomes, girls' education leads to cumulative social benefits for future generations. The level of a mother's education is one of the strongest determinants of mother and child well-being and of daughters' enrollment in school.³⁸ Therefore, increased education opportunities for girls and female youth today contributes to healthier children in future, who will be far more likely to enroll in school themselves, as well enroll their own children. However, progress in girls' education needs to go beyond just increasing access and attendance; actual learning and the development of core competencies needs to take place. According to UNGEI, girls still face significant disadvantages in the classroom relative to boys due to limitations on subjects they can study, negative stereotypes/gender biases portrayed in textbooks, and teachers' attitudes towards female learners. In addition, the education of girls is often given less priority than the education of boys, making girls more likely to be withdrawn from school due to poverty and acute crises, including conflict and natural disasters.³⁹ At the same time, as noted previously, factors affecting an increasing trend for boys to drop out in Southern Africa should also be addressed. Achieving gender parity in education must go beyond enrollment, parity must also apply to quality. This is fundamental to redressing inequality and marginalization of girls and women across all sectors, including eventually in the labor force and political leadership.

The key to addressing the persistent gaps outlined above is for African governments, together with the support of donors, NGOs, foundations, Diaspora organizations, as well as the private sector, to meet the Dakar target of 9 percent of GDP expenditure on education, in combination with the strengthening of management of education systems to ensure that increased funding is used appropriately. For countries with very low GDPs, additional support may be required to ensure that

³⁷ UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Ed Stats, August 2010.

³⁸ UNDG Task Force on the MDG, 'Thematic paper on MDG 2'.

³⁹ UNGEI at 10: A Journey to Gender Equality in Education, page 2.

adequate resources are available to reach excluded populations. In addition, for those countries where they do not already exist, minimum standards for quality teaching and learning need to be established, following the examples already developed in Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and other countries. Without this foundation of quality and adequate investment in education, not aid, sustainable progress will be difficult if not impossible. At present, the Commission for Africa estimates that for Africa to meet the 2015 EFA and MDG2 targets, an additional US\$7 - US\$8 billion investment is required per year. Although many countries are spending more on education, most are well below the 9 percent target; on average, governments in Africa still only spend 4 percent of GDP on education. Unfortunately, four countries (Congo Brazzaville, Equatorial Guinea, The Gambia, and Mauritania) have cut education budgets since 2000, with Congo Brazzaville having reduced its by more than 70 percent. At the low end of expenditure, Sudan and Equatorial Guinea, comparatively well off countries due to petroleum reserves, are only spending 0.3 percent and 1.4 percent of GDP respectively.⁴⁰ This type of commitment will not engender investment and technical support from donors and education partners, nor is it in the best interests of children and youth, who in future should be the driving force behind their countries' economies.

4. Quality Education For All: Ensuring Equity

a. Issues, challenges, and interventions

Inequity in education and the exclusion of certain populations and groups is caused by a variety of factors including: gender, poverty, remoteness, ethnicity, language, religion, physical disabilities, health, environment and conflict. In addition, specific vulnerable groups including: orphans, children from very large families, street children, children affected by HIV/AIDS, children affected/displaced by armed conflict or natural disasters, working children, children who have dropped-out of school, pastoralists/nomadic communities, and at risk children and youth, depending on the context, may be completely denied their fundamental human right to education. The challenge to education systems in Africa is to better identify and understand the needs of these groups/populations, and to develop targeted equity-based approaches that ensure the inclusion and full participation of all children and youth in quality education. The most effective way to do this is to analyze data collected by a variety of mechanisms, including EMIS and household surveys conducted in the poorest regions/districts of a country. At the community and school levels, trained teachers, head teachers, and local education officials need to have links with parents and the wider community to understand who is not in school and why. In some countries, e.g. Tanzania, community-based Management Information Systems have served this purpose, and in many countries in Southern Africa, systems developed to identify orphans and vulnerable children are also being used to help ensure that those children at greatest risk remain in school.

Inequity in access to education services is linked to geography, language, ethnicity, and level of parents' education (especially the mother's). This is reinforced by the fact that many governments in Africa spend less on those communities/regions in greatest need, e.g. those in remote parts of the country. The poorest children, who would benefit most from increased investment and better sector planning, are the least likely to receive the essential targeted interventions that can reduce inequity. In many parts of the continent, stark regional differences exist in the access to early childhood education and care, among other basic services, which could otherwise offset the disadvantages of poverty, growing up in a marginalized rural community, or having one or more parents who did not complete primary school. According to recent estimates, a child growing up in one of Zambia's poorest communities is 12 times less likely to benefit from early childhood care

⁴⁰ The African Child Policy Forum, 'Investing in Education: A Pathway to Development'; A 2007 Federal Ministry of Education report indicates that expenditure on education in the northern states of the Sudan was 0.7 percent of GDP.

than a child from one of the wealthiest communities; this factor rises to 25 in Uganda and 28 in Egypt.⁴¹ Too often, those children with the greatest need for a “head start” in life or additional years of education are least likely to receive this support because of their socio-economic status, reinforcing the cycle of poverty within their families and under-development in their communities. Furthermore, in many countries the poorest communities are often asked to contribute their own resources to fund school construction or to support teacher salaries, whereas less poor urban communities are better catered for. In the current context inequity reinforces entrenched poverty and its inherent disadvantages, and until African governments invest more in the poorest parts of their countries, as is done in many developed countries, Education for All cannot be achieved.

Gender is also a compounding factor that increases inequity. In rural Upper Egypt, more than 40 percent of the population lives in poverty and girls in the region average just over four years of schooling – far below the national average for girls of 10 years.⁴² As discussed above, gender parity in net enrollment is improving in a number of countries, however, gender disparity in achievement, as measured by scores on mathematics tests from countries in Southern and Eastern Africa, although varied across the sub-region, remains a concern. According to SACMEQ, Grade 6 test results for girls ‘...suggest that there is a need to move the focus of the gender-related interventions beyond “access” and “participation” and concentrate more on “achievement”, especially in less advantaged settings’.⁴³

Based on the latest practices and research by UNESCO (*Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010: Reaching the Marginalized*, and *Inclusive Education and Schools: A Framework for Educational Access and Quality*) and UNICEF, among other organizations, the following strategies, policy recommendations and interventions have proven to be successful and should be considered by African governments, and in turn supported by donors from pilot to roll-out phase, to ensure greater inclusion of marginalized children and youth and equity in the delivery of services.

Inclusion of the excluded

Focus more on the “last 10 to 15 percent” of the population that are not yet included, and less on universal approaches to increasing net enrollment. Resources should be used strategically to increase equity in education by ‘lowering cost barriers, bringing schools closer to marginalized communities, and developing second chance programs’ for children and youth who have dropped out. Education policy and planning should be driven by evidence and budgetary allocations to different locations at all levels of the system should be equitable with specific measures to enhance education access for the most marginalized. In marginalized communities the learning environment needs to be improved by ‘deploying skilled teachers equitably, targeting financial and learning support to disadvantaged schools, and providing inter-cultural and bilingual education.’⁴⁴

Abolish school fees and provide support for other costs for the most marginalized

The elimination or reduction of school fees in primary and ultimately post-primary education is the single most effective way to reduce financial barriers to education and boost enrollment. Extensive examples from African countries demonstrate the link between increasing net enrollment and the abolition of school fees. However, for many poor children and families, the indirect and opportunity costs associated with education still present considerable financial barriers.

Early childhood education

⁴¹ UNESCO EFA GMR 2010 full report, page 52.

⁴² Third Arab Report on the MDGs 2010 and the Impact of the Global Economic Crisis, page 33.

⁴³ SACMEQ Policy Issues Series, Number 4, September 2010.

⁴⁴ UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010 Summary, page 5.

Start education as early as possible, through the increased provision of pre-school and early childhood education, especially in the poorest communities. Effective ECE programs integrate health, nutrition, and education, promote healthy child development, and ensure that children are ready to succeed in primary school. Governments should link lower primary grades and formal curriculum, where appropriate, with community-based pre-schools. For example, in Somalia the lower primary curriculum for language and math has been introduced, in combination with teacher training, in select community-run Qur'anic schools. Similarly, Nigeria has developed a model whereby Qur'anic education is broadened to include mathematics, other languages and life-skills.

School feeding

Proper nutrition is essential for child development and learning. School feeding and the provision of take-home rations serve as an incentive for vulnerable families to send their children to school. Although costly, school feeding programs are highly effective at increasing enrollment, retention, and learning outcomes of students. Data from the World Food Program from 32 countries in sub-Saharan Africa found enrollment increased by 28 percent for girls and 22 percent for boys during the first year of school feeding. Children, especially the most vulnerable, who may only eat one meal per day, cannot be expected to learn on empty stomachs. Currently an estimated 66 million children attend school hungry, about 40 percent of them in Africa. Until this is addressed, schools in Africa will not be able to provide the same quality of education that is offered in most developed countries, where school lunch, and in some cases breakfast programs, are the norm.⁴⁵

Mandate inclusive education

Where they do not exist, introduce constitutional/legislative mandates and policies that guarantee free, compulsory primary education for all, and establish target dates for free post primary education (including alternative models and technical and vocational education and training). Support for all types of marginalized children should be explicitly reflected in national education policies and specific corrective policies to promote inclusion in schools. Within the framework of inclusive education, diversity should be viewed as an opportunity, and student assessment should be adjusted accordingly. Understanding the needs and differences of diverse populations is also essential for identifying marginalized groups/communities and developing appropriate responses.

Reform systems and strengthen information management

Use ongoing reform, development/implementation of a SWAp, and the overall strengthening of education systems (especially in the areas of EMIS, teacher education/certification and professional development, curriculum development, evaluation, quality assurance and budgeting) to enhance education quality and improve equity of service delivery. Strengthen EMIS to track exclusion and outcomes for disadvantaged children, analyze data to identify marginalized groups, guide targeted responses, and monitor progress. Commission complementary studies to identify reasons for exclusion and help design alternative approaches to basic education where possible. Support decentralized approaches to education planning so that local realities are addressed.

Cash transfers, vouchers and scholarships

Where school fees continue to exist, introduce cash transfer schemes to the most vulnerable families to ensure that all children can attend school. Alternative strategies include providing grants to Community Education Committees/Parent Teacher Associations so that schools have the means to waive school fees on a case-by-case basis, depending on level of vulnerability. Successful experiences in cash transfers and social protection schemes are now being replicated

⁴⁵ The feasibility and cost-effectiveness of blanket approaches to school feeding need to be analyzed. Targeted approaches focused on schools that serve the most marginalized communities should be given priority.

in Southern Africa, e.g., by providing a financial or in-kind incentive for girls and other vulnerable groups to offset indirect and opportunity costs to education. Vouchers can include food baskets, school uniforms, school supplies, clothing, books, etc., and can involve public/private partnerships. Such measures can also enhance access to post-primary education for marginalized groups.

Child-centered approaches

Teaching and learning practices should be child-centered, interactive, and flexible (in terms of school hours/schedules and multi-grade classrooms). Teachers should be trained on the importance of engaging girl students and understand how to overcome barriers to the participation of girls and boys. In many countries, more female teachers need to be recruited and trained to provide role models and increase safety/quality at schools. Traditional teaching methods need to evolve so that instruction is more open-ended, inquiry and activity-based and learning situations should be relevant and meaningful for students. The development of critical thinking skills at the youngest possible age - leading to the ability to question the status quo and offer innovative solutions to complex problems - is an invaluable human quality, and necessary for development.

Child friendly minimum standards

Promote minimum standards for inclusive schools by adapting, for example, the UNICEF Child Friendly Schools Framework⁴⁶ to local contexts and needs. To the greatest extent possible, child friendly standards should be incorporated within education policies related to school construction, water and sanitation facilities, teacher training, school governance, community participation, etc.

Language of instruction

Enact mother tongue-based language policies, with the medium of instruction in ECE and lower primary grades in the child's maternal language, to promote the earliest possible development of cognitive and literacy skills.

Non-formal/alternative education

Provide complementary basic education through non-formal approaches, accelerated learning for youth, distance-learning, flexible curricula/learning hours, and innovative approaches for pastoralist communities. Non-formal education should be recognized by education authorities and have degree equivalents with the formal system (i.e. students who complete primary education through non-formal means should be able to continue their education at secondary, technical/vocational, or other levels). Non-formal education should be mainstreamed to avoid the creation of parallel systems and different standards. Encouraging examples are from Kenya and Eritrea, where Nomadic Education policies have been developed, and Ethiopia, which has established Alternative Approaches to Basic Education and has devolved funding to local authorities.

Emergency preparedness and response

Develop emergency education preparedness and disaster risk reduction plans, and train local officials and education partners to lead response, in countries/regions at risk of conflict and/or natural disaster. As a national priority, governments of countries where there is a current (or possible risk of) humanitarian crisis, must advocate with donors on the critical importance of quality education during emergencies.⁴⁷ Emergency education preparedness should be reflected in local authority plans and school plans to ensure continuity of services during emergencies.

⁴⁶ The five qualities of a UNICEF Child Friendly School are: 1) inclusive of children; 2) effective for learning; 3) healthy and protective of children; 4) gender sensitive; and 5) involved with children, families, and communities, see www.unicef.org/cfs/.

⁴⁷ See Inter-Agency Network for Education and Emergencies (INEE), www.ineesite.org, for more about the importance of emergency education, preparedness and planning, during times of crises.

b. Highlights of good examples of equity approaches in Africa

As mentioned above, a number of countries with large out of school populations have made significant advances in increasing net enrollment, but too few are sufficiently addressing problems related to education quality and equitable access to services. Between 1999 and 2007, Ethiopia and Tanzania each reduced the number of children out of school by over 3 million - important milestones towards achieving Universal Primary Education. Emphasizing net enrollment, while overlooking the need to simultaneously increase funding for primary education and increase the number of trained teachers, will only erode the quality of education, and further stress under-performing systems. Nor will this approach help to ensure the inclusion of the most vulnerable. One country, Benin, has experienced rapid improvements in net enrollment, which has increased from 50 percent in 1999 to 80 percent in 2007. In addition, the gender parity Index has improved from 0.67 in 1999 to 0.83 in 2006. Based on its current progress, Benin could achieve universal primary enrollment by 2015. Furthermore, according to the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010*, the government will make additional funding available for the increased demands placed on the system, as well as special measures prioritizing girls and disadvantaged populations.

'The government has taken steps in its 2006–2015 education plan to redress imbalances, including affirmative action for girls and disadvantaged groups and regions — and strong budget commitments. Education spending accounted for 18 percent of budget spending in 2006. Just over half of the education budget is directed to primary schooling.'⁴⁸

This type of commitment and good practice should convince international donors that Benin can take the final steps necessary towards achieving Universal Primary Education, and serve as a catalyst for additional investment.

There are also increasing examples of equity-based approaches to support girls' education, which if implemented together with social mobilization campaigns, can help to change attitudes and increase enrollment and retention. In Chad, financial and cultural barriers to girls' education are being addressed by scholarships and community sensitization campaigns. The program works with mothers' associations, religious leaders, local government and village elders, and school officials to promote girls' education. According to the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010*, 'the role of imams in asserting the consistency of gender equality in education with the precepts of Islam has been particularly important'.⁴⁹ Initiatives such as these have contributed to Chad's progress in improving the gender parity Index from 0.58 in 1999 to 0.70 in 2007, with improved gender parity also contributing to overall increases in net enrollment. Similarly, the Girls' Education Project in Nigeria has contributed to dramatic increases in girls' enrollment and specific measures to promote girls' education have been mainstreamed in state plans.

Fortunately, participation in ECE or pre-primary education programs is steadily increasing, with sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia reporting the fastest gross enrollment gains in the world. Nonetheless, the average of one child out of seven in sub-Saharan Africa enrolled in pre-primary education compares poorly with the one out of three average for all developing countries worldwide. Sub-Saharan Africa has increased pre-primary enrollment at three times the rate of Arab States, with GERs rising by more than 20 percent since 1999 in several countries, including Burundi, Liberia and Senegal.⁵⁰ In Tunisia, a quality assurance system has been established for

⁴⁸ UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010, page 64.

⁴⁹ Ibid, page 66.

⁵⁰ Ibid, page 50.

day care centers for very young children (up to three years old). This system has been progressively expanded to include public, private, and NGO-managed kindergartens.

Rwanda simultaneously employs several equity-based approaches, and as a result, is on track to meet MDGs 2 and 3 related to Universal Primary Education and gender parity in access to primary education. In 2003, the government established a policy of nine years of free basic education (primary to lower secondary), which by 2009 had resulted in a net enrollment rate of 94 percent, but with a low transition rate to lower secondary (53 percent) and a high drop-out rate (13.9 percent). To address this, the Ministry of Education determined that the Child Friendly Schools (CFS) model, which had already been piloted in 52 schools, was the best approach for improving the quality of basic education and achieving high enrollment and retention rates, as well as gender parity. As a result, the CFS model has been adopted by the government as minimum standard for basic education in Rwanda and its use is required by all education partners. In support of this, the government, UN, and donors have concluded that extending the CFS standards beyond six years to reach nine years (including lower secondary), in combination with nine years of free education, is the best way of ensuring that future generations of girls and boys are well educated and capable of contributing to Rwanda's vision as a knowledge-based economy by year 2020. To complement significant government financial support, bilateral donors and the UN have also committed to secure the necessary investment to make this bold, equity-based plan a success.

Over the past decade, Tunisia has adopted a variety of equity promotion programs. A 1999 study identified the least performing primary and early secondary schools, 90 percent of which were in rural underserved areas. The Education Priority Program was initiated to provide specific support to these schools consisting of improvements of the school infrastructure and the quality of the learning environment, in-service training for teachers and headmasters, and extra curricular activities and psycho-social support services for students. Five years later, an evaluation showed that the performance of nearly 70 percent of the targeted 800 schools had improved. To support the needs of disabled children, an inclusive education program was initiated. This program contributed to improved physical accessibility of target schools, the provision of specialized equipment and in-service training for teachers, headmasters and supervisors, and strengthened networking between schools, NGOs and social and health services. To improve school readiness, children with disabilities also benefit from at least one year of pre-school. To further support ECE in vulnerable rural communities, pre-school classes were established in primary schools. By 2008, nearly 1,800 schools in Tunisia (75 percent in rural areas) offered pre-primary classes.

c. Lessons learned and directions for action

The direct and indirect costs associated with education are especially burdensome, in many cases prohibitive, for poor and vulnerable families who have to make difficult choices on how to best use meager resources. Often the choice is between feeding the family, paying the rent, or sending an additional child to school. When one family member becomes sick, and user fees must be paid for basic healthcare, a child is all too often withdrawn from school to make ends meet. Those countries which have taken the bold step to eliminate fees and other costs normally borne by parents, or that have introduced conditional cash transfer/social protection programs for poor families, are alleviating the burden of poverty and are allowing more families to send more of their children to school, for more years. Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, and Zimbabwe offer some of the best examples, and Zambia has provided capitation grants to support community schools. Innovative measures have also been introduced in Tunisia, where Social Security child benefits are only paid to families if the child is enrolled in school, and in Egypt, through the Community School program, girls' access to education has been promoted by establishing schools in under-served communities

and providing school supplies and students kits to alleviate the financial burden on families. School fee abolition has had by far the most widespread and direct impact on equity and inclusion – it addresses the rights and needs of marginalized, excluded and vulnerable children – as even small fees for families/children in these groups are often insurmountable.

The latest analysis of progress towards achieving the MDGs and EFA goals underscores the importance of proper nutrition and early childhood care and education as a necessary foundation for life-long learning and cognitive and physical development. According to UNESCO, malnutrition 'is damaging the bodies and minds of around 178 million young children globally per year, undermining their potential for learning, reinforcing inequality in education and beyond, and reducing the efficiency of investment in school systems.'⁵¹ Going forward, it is of utmost importance for African governments to tackle inequality in access to early childhood care, as those populations '...in greatest need of early childhood care – and with the most to gain from it – have the least access.' Unless the cycle of inequity is broken, children from families that are relatively well off and educated will continue to have the greatest advantages early in life which will have a significant impact on learning and development, while children from the poorest families, who need ECE programs the most, will continue to have the least access. There is both a moral and developmental responsibility for African governments and donors to ensure greater equity in the provision and financing of ECE programs across the continent.

The list of possible interventions to improve the equity of education (summarized in section 3a) is extensive. Given the enormous financial constraints on the sector, both globally and at national levels, it is not realistic, nor feasible to assume all approaches can be initiated simultaneously, or given equal priority. Governments, with the support of donors and education partners, must make pragmatic decisions, depending on individual country needs, and should use the best evidence available to determine strategies which will be most effective for a given context and population. These decisions should then inform better planning, and facilitate improved harmonization and alignment within the sector. Long-term planning should identify when and how additional equity promoting strategies will be progressively introduced, and how they will be paid for.

Some measures that promote equity and inclusion are not prohibitively expensive. The drafting and legal endorsement of equity-based policies requires political will, and acceptance amongst different branches of government that the profile of education must be raised in order for all African countries to be able to guarantee this basic human right, as well as to achieve development ambitions, including the 2015 goals and targets. Other measures, such as the use of bilingual curricula and maternal languages in pre-school and early primary grades, should not be seen as threats to national identity or cohesiveness, but rather as a reflection of cultural and ethnic diversity and the importance of developing cognitive skills at the earliest possible age. Identifying children with disabilities who are out of school, estimated to be 25 million worldwide⁵², and improving physical access to schools, or appreciating that street children and youth can live productive lives and have better futures if they are educated, requires adopting a spirit of inclusion, mandating specialized programs, and finding locally developed cost-effective solutions for delivery. Bold political actions and decisions can end or reduce the continued exclusion of certain populations of children, e.g. orphans, those who are affected by HIV/AIDS, or those who have to work to support their families. The most vulnerable in society should no longer be left permanently on the margins.

5. The Quality Imperative: Enhancing Teaching Quality

⁵¹ Ibid, page 42.

⁵² UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010

a. Teacher quality as a requirement for education quality: Issues and challenges

Teacher quality and motivation is a determining factor for education quality and impacts significantly on student achievement. Among the criteria of an effective teacher are: commitment to students and their learning; solid knowledge and understanding about the subjects taught and having the ability to teach them; responsibility for managing and monitoring students' learning; ability to think systematically about his/her practice and learn from experience; ability to serve as a role model; creativity and being open to change, among others. The impact of a quality teacher is the single most important determining factor for the achievement of students, and can significantly offset other shortcomings in schools, including those related to physical infrastructure and limitations on the availability of teaching and learning materials. A regional assessment of 13 countries in East and Southern Africa conducted by SACMEQ suggests that only 57 percent of students are attaining basic levels in reading and an estimated mere 25 percent for mathematics.⁵³ For those students who do complete five or six years of primary education, the quality and relevance of their education appears to be low, with many leaving school without having achieved a functional level of literacy and numeracy. Based on similar data for the other sub-regions, one can assume similar low levels of education quality, as measured by the development of literacy and numeracy skills, elsewhere on the continent.

In order for African countries to improve the level of learning outcomes for students completing primary education, the following components of quality teaching need to be strengthened:⁵⁴

- 1) Appropriate, relevant and inclusive educational objectives;
- 2) Relevant and broad curriculum content;
- 3) Adequate time for learning, and its appropriate use;
- 4) Effective teaching styles;
- 5) Appropriate language(s) of instruction, including use of maternal languages in pre-school and early primary grades;
- 6) Regular, reliable and timely student assessment, both summative and formative.

In the traditional teaching quality appraisal framework, education authorities in many African countries, as well as teachers and community members, are used to viewing the teacher only as a recipient individual, implementing decisions made at higher level for the larger education system. This limited perception does not recognize the fact that teachers are in a pivotal position to influence education quality, and that they should play a central role in the design and implementation of a transformative agenda to improve teaching and learning outcomes. Teachers must also play a lead role in making education inclusive for all by giving increased attention to the language of instruction and the diverse needs, linguistic, physical, and other, of children.

Furthermore, African governments, particularly Ministries of Education should incorporate three critical dimensions related to teaching quality (managerial and pedagogical) when designing teacher quality policies:

- 1) Teacher training and continuous learning opportunities for teachers, covering teacher profiles, competencies and motivation, teacher support and relationships;

⁵³ In reading and maths tests, skill orders are divided into 8 levels. The threshold of "minimum" achievement for reading is set at level 3, so achievement between levels 4 and 8 is regarded as minimum level. Due to technical discrepancies the threshold for minimum maths achievement was not established. The 25% achievement level cited above was extrapolated by applying the same criteria for reading achievement.

⁵⁴ UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2004.

- 2) Classroom practices and processes, including classroom organization, pupil grouping, lesson instructions, teaching-learning process, use of teaching and learning materials, student initiative in teaching-learning process, and student assessment and frequency;
- 3) Quality educational inputs and the creation of an enabling and gender sensitive environment.

Creating a classroom context that is relevant to the needs and experiences of children, where meaningful learning takes place, involves attitudinal and conceptual changes of teachers, administrators and others involved in education. On a conceptual level, it requires a new philosophical and theoretical understanding of education as a social process that originates from community needs, interests, and aspirations. With regards to attitude, it is assumed that the teacher will become involved as a local development agent, who is accepted and integrated into the cultural matrix and, from this acceptance, changes the teaching practices in the classroom and community. The teacher's integration into community dynamics is vital as it allows him or her to make the school/classroom more inclusive and child friendly, and creates an entry point for the community to be involved in all aspects related to the school and its management.

The Dakar Framework of Action recognizes that in order to achieve quality education, all aspects of education must be improved (Goal 6). In the African context, the realization of Goal 6 depends, to a large extent, on the promotion of educational reform which includes the use of African languages and promotion of cultures as key elements within the national curriculum, and implementation of mother-tongue based multi-lingual and multi-cultural education programs. Quality teaching and learning requires the development and implementation of relevant curriculum, including training in its use, building upon the knowledge and experience of teachers and learners. Several countries, notably The Gambia, Mali, and Rwanda, receiving technical support through UNESCO and BEAP, are also moving towards an uninterrupted extended primary school cycle which includes Grades 9 and 10. This more holistic vision of quality basic education further reaffirms a rights-based approach and promotes equity. Through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, enhanced by two additional years study at the primary level, young people will be better prepared for secondary and tertiary education, and have a greater opportunity for personal and professional success later in life.

The use of African languages in education and the success of other ongoing educational reforms are closely related to the type and quality of pre and in-service training for teachers. In January 2010 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, African Ministries of Education, the Association of the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), and UNESCO collaboratively elaborated a policy guide for the integration of African languages and cultures in the education. This guide was later amended and adopted by African governments and includes short, medium, and long-term strategies for the preparation of both pre-service and in-service teacher training programs, covering early childhood education to higher education, along with other necessary actions which will contribute to the provision of quality education.

To ensure that all children have access to quality teachers, who can effectively teach in both their local and the official languages, a decentralized teacher recruitment policy is recommended in connection with the promotion of a national language policy for education. In the multi-lingual contexts common in Africa, the effective use of local languages depends heavily on teachers' linguistic competence and deployment. As a result, it was recommended in the above-mentioned guide, that to ensure fair and adequate recruitment and deployment of teachers, each country should develop a national policy on teacher-training and recruitment that reflects the importance of multi-lingual and multi-cultural education. UNESCO and ADEA are jointly supporting African

governments in the implementation of the policy guide for the integration of African languages and cultures in education. In addition, the main outcome document of the October 2009 Bamako + 5 Conference on 'How to Manage Contractual Teachers with a View to Ensuring the Success of Education For All', recommends that African governments adopt inclusive education and teaching policies that take into account non-formal education (NFE) personnel.

b. Highlights of good examples of teacher policies and practices in the region

It is highly encouraging that African governments and non-governmental organizations involved in education are increasingly relying on the use of local languages to respond to the needs of learners and to address the quality imperative. There are good practices promoted in many countries, including Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali and Niger, with regard to teacher training and curriculum development, which have had positive impacts on teaching and learning outcomes. The increased use of African languages in education has contributed to an overall improvement in the quality of teaching and learning through effective communication and interaction that sustains learning and encourages active participation of learners. The high achievement rates associated with bilingual education at the primary level, along with the improved socio-cultural integration of teachers in their communities, is attributed to the increased use of local languages and indigenous knowledge and cultures in the school curriculum. With regard to cost effectiveness, the use of local language can contribute to savings, as demonstrated by the success of bilingual education in Burkina Faso. Through the use of local languages, the government is promoting a five year lower primary education instead of six years. This contributes to cutting the cost of education and expanding access to quality education to all children and youth.

Another positive development in parts of the continent has been the increasing alignment of non-formal and formal education systems. The Quality Node on NFE, coordinated by the Ministry of Basic Education of Burkina Faso, has established both a political and technical support mechanism, based on South-South cooperation, to facilitate peer learning and support for countries which have embarked on, or are in the initial process of, elaborating multi-lingual education policies and programs. This initiative will significantly contribute to enhancing the quality of both teacher training curriculum, as well as teacher policy in Africa for the benefit for all learners. It has been further recognized that the formulation and implementation of adequate and comprehensive regional and national teacher policies requires the continued integration and professionalization of bilingual and NFE teachers.

In addition to the development of policies promoting teaching quality, the increasing role of higher education institutions in teacher training and development, for example in Ghana at the Universities of Cape Coast and Winniba, was highlighted at the above-mentioned Bamako +5 Conference in 2009. Ghana's commitment to link higher education with teacher development is based on the importance of education and teaching quality in order to achieve the EFA goals. Teacher development as a means of improving the quality of education is now seen as a critical part of education reform in Africa. The Ghanaian experience in this field has led to the establishment of graduate training programs, and distance and evening classes for the benefit of teachers already in the classroom. These programs are implemented in collaboration with teacher training institutions (colleges) and provide courses on pedagogy, curriculum development, and professional ethics, while also establishing standards for higher-level certification.

Guinea also provides examples of effective in-service training aimed at improving teacher quality. The Guinean educational system has been offering continuing teacher professional development programs for more than a decade. Through school-based learning opportunities for practicing

teachers, which have helped to transform primary and secondary schools and classrooms, teachers have been mobilized to carry out joint projects to their develop pedagogical skills. This has helped to pool together novice practitioners with more experienced teachers, thereby building up their confidence and professional skills, while creating an atmosphere of greater professionalism and collegiality in schools.

c. Priorities for action to improve the quality of teaching and learning

Across the continent, there is a growing recognition of the need to address issues related to teaching quality, in addition to the imperative to increase equity, and that a focus on pedagogy and its training implications needs to be at the heart of the commitment to improve student retention, progression and learning outcomes.⁵⁵ The *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010*, which focuses on the most marginalized children, reflects this shift in emphasis. The report calls for a commitment to policies that focus on the creation of an effective learning environment for all children regardless of background, through the provision of adequate facilities, well-trained teachers, a relevant curriculum and clearly defined learning outcomes. Most importantly, it acknowledges that educational quality is largely obtained through pedagogical processes in the classroom and that what students achieve is heavily influenced by the knowledge, skills, dispositions and commitment of the teachers in whose care students are entrusted.

The main lesson learned from ongoing efforts to improve teaching quality in Africa is that a systemic approach to teacher education is required if teachers are to develop and maintain the necessary skills to ensure effective learning outcomes in classrooms. Such an approach needs to address the broader context of overall support to teacher management and development, including issues of recruitment, deployment, accreditation, remuneration and other incentives. It therefore requires a set of equity and quality promoting policies that ensure the following:⁵⁶

- 1) An adequate supply of teachers to ensure that enrollment gains do not further erode education quality;
- 2) The ability to deploy teachers with the required skills, including fluency in local maternal languages;
- 3) Training programs and systems that equip teachers with the required skills;
- 4) Management and career structures that result in consistent, high quality performance by teachers.

In placing pedagogy, and its training implications, at the forefront of an overall strategy for improving teaching quality, it should also be acknowledged that teacher capacity is only one dimension of quality and that a holistic approach to building an education system is required.⁵⁷ For all teachers and students to be reached, especially those in the poorest communities, urban slums, and remote rural areas, it is essential that national governments develop a broad strategic approach to enhancing the quality of education, which emphasizes the equitable distribution of resources in sector plans at national and sub-national levels, including funding for teacher development. Other cross-sectoral issues also need to be addressed to ensure equitable access to a quality education, including health, nutrition, water and sanitation and school readiness through early childhood development interventions.

6. Equity and quality: recommendations and the way forward

⁵⁵ Aslam and Kingdom, 2007; Alexander, 2008; Riddell, 2008; Stuart et al, 2009; Nikel and Low, 2010.

⁵⁶ Stuart et al., 2009; Mulkeen, 2010.

⁵⁷ Mingat, 2005.

In pursuit of the sustainable achievement of MDGs 2 and 3, and the EFA goals and targets by 2015, much remains to be done. Governments, donors, NGOs, and other education partners need to maximize efforts to strengthen systems and take progressive steps towards improving the equity and quality of education. Throughout the continent the foundation for the work which must take place over the next four years is already in place. It has been demonstrated that massive increases in enrollment are possible, that more girls can complete primary education and continue on to secondary and tertiary levels, and that focused interventions that increase access to pre-school in rural areas can improve learning outcomes later in life. The evidence also demonstrates that steps should be well-planned and taken progressively so that, for example, demand for education services does not reduce the overall effectiveness and quality of teaching and learning. Children and youth must leave school with real knowledge and skills, not empty degrees, so that they are able to make an active contribution to their communities and the nation as a whole.

As a first step, each country needs to evaluate the areas where it is making progress towards the 2015 goals and targets, and more importantly, where significant gaps still exist. Annual milestones should then be set to help the country get on track. By using the best evidence available, education authorities should introduce targeted interventions to reduce inequalities in those parts of the country where assistance is needed most; in some cases, the number and percentage of out of school children goes well beyond those in the lowest quintile. If school fees or opportunity costs for education are keeping a certain population of children and youth out of school, then governments should consider augmenting individual school budgets by introducing capitation grants, to be gradually increased and eventually replacing school fees altogether. In many countries in Africa, a decentralized approach which empowers communities and schools has proven to be effective at reaching marginalized populations. Over the next four years, underachieving countries should focus efforts on MDG 2, Universal Primary Education, and MDG 3 targets related to education, before establishing aggressive plans, and committing resources, to achieving Universal Secondary Education, which may only be achieved well after 2015.

The concept of school readiness needs to be embraced holistically. Children and their families who are denied access to education, especially in remote rural areas, most likely also suffer from a lack of access to other basic services. If a community is identified for targeted education support, it should also have the facilities in place to provide a minimum package of essential social services including healthcare, nutrition, and proper water and sanitation. This concept is consistent with the Child Friendly Schools framework, or minimum standards for effective schools, where a school is an inherently safe and healthy environment offering services which complement those already provided in the community. For example, increased school feeding - providing healthy meals and essential micro-nutrients and vitamins - could be introduced in communities that suffer from chronic malnutrition, especially at pre-school level. In addition, for children to develop cognitive skills and to learn to read and write as early as possible, classroom instruction at pre-school and early primary levels must take place in the language the child is using at home, i.e. the mother tongue.

The link between HIV/AIDS and education, both in terms of how the disease affects access and attendance and the importance of prevention, needs to be better understood and addressed. The fact that girls are three times more likely to be infected by the virus than boys in some countries demonstrates the tremendous need for enhanced education on sexuality, reproductive health, and family planning, at the appropriate age levels, and with the support of traditional and religious leaders. Education should also be linked with population growth and environmental sustainability. Demographic growth rates of close to 3 percent in many countries on the continent put unsustainable pressure on finite natural resources, e.g. water and pasture in arid parts of the

continent, contribute to rapid urban growth, and place great pressure on under-resourced education systems, already struggling to increase access.

In the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010*, UNESCO estimated that in 2006 approximately one third of all children out of school worldwide suffered some type of disability. Throughout the continent there is scant accurate knowledge about the number of disabled children who are out of school, in addition to those who have manageable physical impairments and are in school, but not receiving the specialized assistance they require to fully achieve their educational potential and actively participate in learning. One can assume that a similar ratio of out of school children in Africa, at least 10 million in sub-Saharan Africa, is affected by disability. If this sizable population were targeted, for example, by capitation grants, alleviation of school fees, and minimal accessibility improvements, as is currently taking place in Ghana, huge enrollment gains could be realized, not to mention tremendous improvements of the quality of life for the children and youth concerned, and the resulting benefits for their families. Rather than being seen as a burden or subject of shame, this population, if given the chance to realize their basic human right to education, could one day contribute to the development of their communities.

Africa can achieve Universal Primary Education and gender parity in education by 2015, among other targets, if concerted efforts are taken now to better understand who is excluded from quality education and why. An equity-based approach for improving access and quality can redress decades or more of exclusion of the most vulnerable and marginalized in society. Pro-poor policies that deal with complicated, yet common inequalities across the continent, that reduce direct and indirect costs associated with education, that help to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and that ensure more equitable distribution of government spending, can make a major difference over the next several years. Through increased investment in education and prioritization of those parts of the country with the least access to quality social services, populations which were once considered economic liabilities will be able to contribute to the shared goal and basic human right of Education for All.