

Foreword

By Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations



UN Photo, Jean-Marc Ferré

Dear Reader,

At its *2011 Annual Session*, ECOSOC adopted a much-needed Ministerial Declaration, one which called for the “effective implementation of the Education for All Agenda” and stressed the “fundamental role education plays in creating an inclusive society, reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development”.

Despite recent progress, which led to millions of out-of-school children enrolling in class for the first time, a staggering 67 million still remain unenrolled, reports UNESCO. Here, as elsewhere, the gender gap persists, with girls accounting for 53 per cent of the total out-of-school figure. Worse still, deteriorating economic conditions in rich and poor countries alike threaten to undermine the positive work of recent years.

Faced with debt and deficits, governments have curtailed social spending at home, as well as the level of development assistance available to finance education and other vital Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

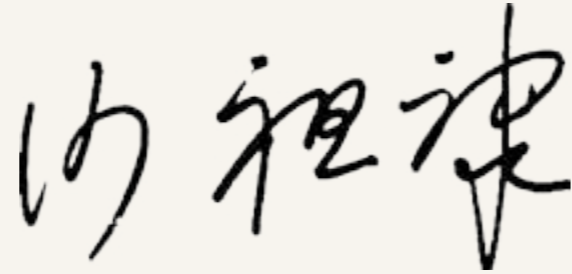
At the same time, rising food and energy prices mean less money left over for investing in things like education, where payoffs are rarely immediate but extend well into the future.

Climate change also threatens progress in achieving the Education for All goals. Many of the most underserved education areas are, after all, the same places most likely to be hit most severely by the extreme effects of climate change. One such consequence—a rise in resource-inspired conflict—is particularly ominous given that some 40 per cent of out-of-school children already live in war-torn states.

ECOSOC must play a crucial role in addressing these challenges. It must continue to build on its special strength as an esteemed global forum—a place where governments, civil society, academia and the business community can meet to discuss and resolve global problems. This past summer in Geneva was one such occasion.

Thus, for all that was accomplished there, I extend my sincere thanks to the many who contributed. Let us continue to work together to advance the United Nations Development Agenda.

Kind regards,



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United Nations