

UNESCO (2015). *Education for all 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges*. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015. Paris, France. Publication by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. 499 pp. ISBN- 978-92-3-10085-0.

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In 2000, at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal; 164 governments agreed on the Dakar Framework for Action, *Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments*² launching an ambitious agenda to reach six wide-ranging education goals by 2015. In order to monitor progress, remaining gaps and provide recommendations, UNESCO initiated in 2002 the elaboration of the Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Reports in response; a number of publications that highlight the remaining gaps and provide recommendations for its achievement. This publication shows the key findings of the 2015 EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) “*Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges*”, which has tracked progress on these goals for the past 15 years. The report has been released one month before the World Education Forum in Incheon (Republic of Korea), in May 2015, where the new education goal and targets of the global development agenda (post 2015) will be discussed in order to be adopted at the UN High-Level Summit in September 2015, so as to have one single education agenda for 2015-2030.

The Report gives on one hand, the verdict on the Education for All goals since 2000, showing that only a third of countries reached all the EFA goals with measurable targets; only half of all countries achieved the most watched goal of universal primary enrolment. It shows that there is an annual US\$22 billion funding gap if we are to reach new education targets by 2030. On the other hand, the Report emphasizes that major existing inequalities in education today is partially to blame for countries’ failure to meet the six EFA goals; as for today the world’s poorest children are four times more likely to be out of primary school than the richest. And girls are still being left behind: a third of countries have yet to reach gender parity in primary education, and girls are more likely never to go to school. Moreover, children in conflict continue to be denied an education: they make up a larger proportion of out of school children today than at the start of the Millennium. Even so, there has been great progress. Since 2000 there are 84 million fewer children and adolescents out of school; the majority (62%) of those are girls. Global enrolment in pre-primary education has increased by two-thirds, and countries all over the world are really starting to invest in monitoring learning by carrying out national assessments.

The content of the report is distributed in two separated parts. The first part is focused on the result analysis of each Education for All Goals -chapter by goal- highlighting the actual

¹ United Nations for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO)

² Dakar Framework for Action “Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitment”, UNESCO 2000
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf>

situation towards its achievements and mentioning the remaining gaps; it also includes a specific chapter providing projections and information related to those countries with incomplete or missing data, this part concludes with a chapter addressing finance; meanwhile the second part does a critical assessment on the proposed post-2015 education targets and offers key recommendations for its accomplishment.

As for the first part of the Report, the specific analysis on Goal 1 - **Expand early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable children** – shows that forty seven percent of countries reached the goal and another eight percent were close. Twenty percent were very far from the goal. Yet, in 2012, nearly two-thirds more children were enrolled in early childhood education than in 1999. The analysis related to Goal 2 - **Achieve universal primary education, particularly for girls, ethnic minorities and marginalized children**-pups up that fifty-two percent of countries achieved this goal; ten percent are close and the remaining thirty-eight percent are far or very far from achieving it. This leaves almost 100 million children not completing primary education in 2015. A lack of focus on the marginalized has left the poorest five times less likely to complete a full cycle of primary education than the richest and over a third of out of school children living in conflict affected zones. Nevertheless, there have been important successes: Around 50 million more children are enrolled in school now than were in 1999. Education is still not free in many places, but cash transfer and school feeding programmes have had a positive impact on school enrolment for the poor. In relation to Goal 3 - **Ensure equal access to learning and life skills for youth and adults** - Forty-six percent of countries reached universal lower secondary enrolment. Globally, numbers in lower secondary education increased by 27% and more than doubled in sub-Saharan Africa. Nonetheless, one third of adolescents in low income countries will not complete lower secondary school in 2015. Moreover, regarding the improvements related to Goal 4 - **Achieving a 50 per cent reduction in levels of adult illiteracy by 2015** - at this moment only 25% of countries reached this goal; 32% remain very far from it. While globally the percentage of illiterate adults fell from 18% in 2000 to 14% in 2015, this progress is almost entirely attributed to more educated young people reaching adulthood. Women continue to make up almost two-thirds of the illiterate adult population. Half of sub-Saharan African women do not have basic literacy skills. Chapter five which is related to Goal 5 - **Achieve gender parity and equality** - remarks that gender parity will be achieved at the primary level in 69% of countries by 2015. At secondary level, only 48% of countries will reach the goal. Child marriage and early pregnancy continue to hinder girls' progress in education as does the need for teacher training in gender sensitive approaches and curriculum reform. Improvements in relation to Goal 6 - **Improve the quality of education and ensure measurable learning outcomes for all** - reflect the numbers of pupils per teacher decreased in 121 of 146 countries between 1990 and 2012 at the primary level, but 4 million more teachers are still needed to get all children into school. Trained teachers remain in short supply in one third of countries; in several sub-Saharan African countries, less than 50 percent are trained. However, education quality has received increased attention since 2000; the number of countries carrying out national learning assessments has doubled. To conclude the first part of the Report, a chapter on **Finance** it broads the scope of the analysis, by

incorporating a specific focus on funding and political will and its relevance towards achieving the goals, it is remarkable to notice that since 2000 many governments significantly increased their spending on education: 38 countries increased their commitment to education by one percentage point or more of GNP. However funding remains a major obstacle at all levels. *“Unless concerted action is taken and education receives the attention that it failed to get during the past 15 years, millions of children will continue to miss out and the transformative vision of the new Sustainable Development agenda will be jeopardized,”* said GMR Director, Aaron Benavot. *“Governments must find ways to mobilize new resources for education. International partners must ensure that aid is distributed to those most in need.”*

The Global Monitoring Report 2015 finalizes, drawing on the second part of the Report a critical assessment on the proposed post-2015 education targets and offering key recommendations for its accomplishment. The chapter provides a general criticism of the current formulation of the targets, as it is stated; to succeed, post 2015 future education targets for education must be specific, relevant and realistic. At current rates, only half of all children in low-income countries are expected to complete lower secondary education by 2030. In many countries even the core goal of achieving universal primary education will remain out of reach without concerted efforts.

The main **recommendations** cover four action areas. The first one, and in order to **complete the Education for All Agenda** governments should make at least one year of pre-primary education compulsory. Education must be **free for all children**: fees for tuition, textbooks, school uniforms and transport must be abolished. Secondly, policy makers should identify and prioritize skills to be acquired by the end of each stage of schooling. Literacy **policies** should link up with the needs of communities. Teacher training should be improved to include gender-focused strategies. Teaching styles should better reflect student needs and the diversity of classroom contexts. Thirdly, in order to improve and achieve **equity in education**, governments, donors and civil society must develop programmes and target funding to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged so no child is left behind. Governments should close critical data gaps in order to be able to direct resources to those most in need. Finally, it is fundamental to **close the finance gap**, the international community, in partnership with countries, must find the means to bridge the US\$22 billion annual finance gap for quality pre-primary and basic education for all by 2030. Clear education finance targets must be established within the Sustainable Development Goals where none currently exist.