

Policy Paper 04

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This paper, jointly released by the Education for All Global Monitoring Report and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, shows that progress in reducing the number of children out of school has stalled. This not only denies millions of children their right to education, but also jeopardizes wider development efforts. The paper sets out five reasons why reversing this trend is urgent.

Reaching out-of-school children is crucial for development

Numbers of children out of school are stagnating

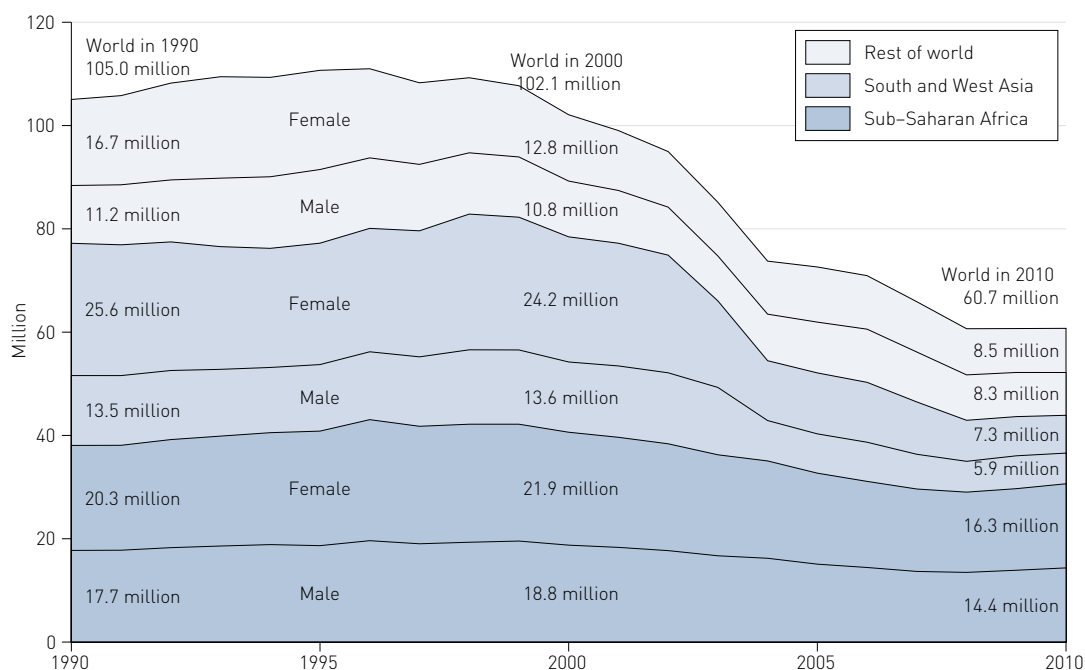
According to the latest data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 61 million children of primary school age were out of school in 2010.¹ The global out-of-school figure had been on a decline over the previous 15 years, falling from 105 million in 1990. Progress was greatest immediately after the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000, when world leaders committed to achieve Education for All by 2015 (Figure 1). In addition, efforts to improve educational access for girls have paid off. In 2010, girls accounted for 53% of out-of-school children, compared with 58% in 2000.

Despite overall positive signs, the decline in out-of-school figures has slowed down since 2005.

Worryingly, the number of out-of-school children has remained at 61 million over the last three years. Much of this global stagnation is due to trends in sub-Saharan Africa, where the number of children out of school has actually risen over the past three years, from 29 million in 2008 to 31 million in 2010. Although enrolment has continued to rise, it has not kept pace with the increase in population.

Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for half of all out-of-school children worldwide and has the highest out-of-school rate of all regions; almost one in four (23%) primary school age children have either never attended school or left school without completing primary education. Out-of-school figures in sub-Saharan Africa have declined far less than in other regions, from 38 million in 1990 to 31 million in 2010.

Figure 1: Number of out-of-school children by region and sex, 1990-2010



Source: UIS database, 2012.

By contrast, South and West Asia have made great gains over the past two decades, reducing the number of out-of-school children by two-thirds from 39 million in 1990 to 13 million in 2010. In 2010, the out-of-school rate in South and West Asia was 8%.

The remaining regions have significantly fewer children out of school: Arab States (5.0 million), Latin America and the Caribbean (2.7 million), North America and Western Europe (1.3 million), Central and Eastern Europe (0.9 million), and Central Asia (0.3 million). Typically, it is the marginalized, the poor, remote rural populations, those affected by conflict, and, ethnic, racial and linguistic minorities, that are denied an opportunity for schooling, as analyses in EFA Global Monitoring Reports underscore. Exclusion from education also threatens development progress more generally.

How many children are out of school across regions?

Out-of-school patterns vary across and within regions. In 2010, there were 19 countries with more than 500,000 out-of-school children (Figure 2). A number of these countries are in sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria alone was home to 10.5 million out-of-school children – 3.6 million more than in 2000 – or 42% of its primary school age population. Ethiopia had 2.4 million children out of school, which represents 18% of the country's

primary school age population. While this number is high, Ethiopia has made considerable progress since 2000, when 6.3 million children (60% of the primary school age population) were out of school.

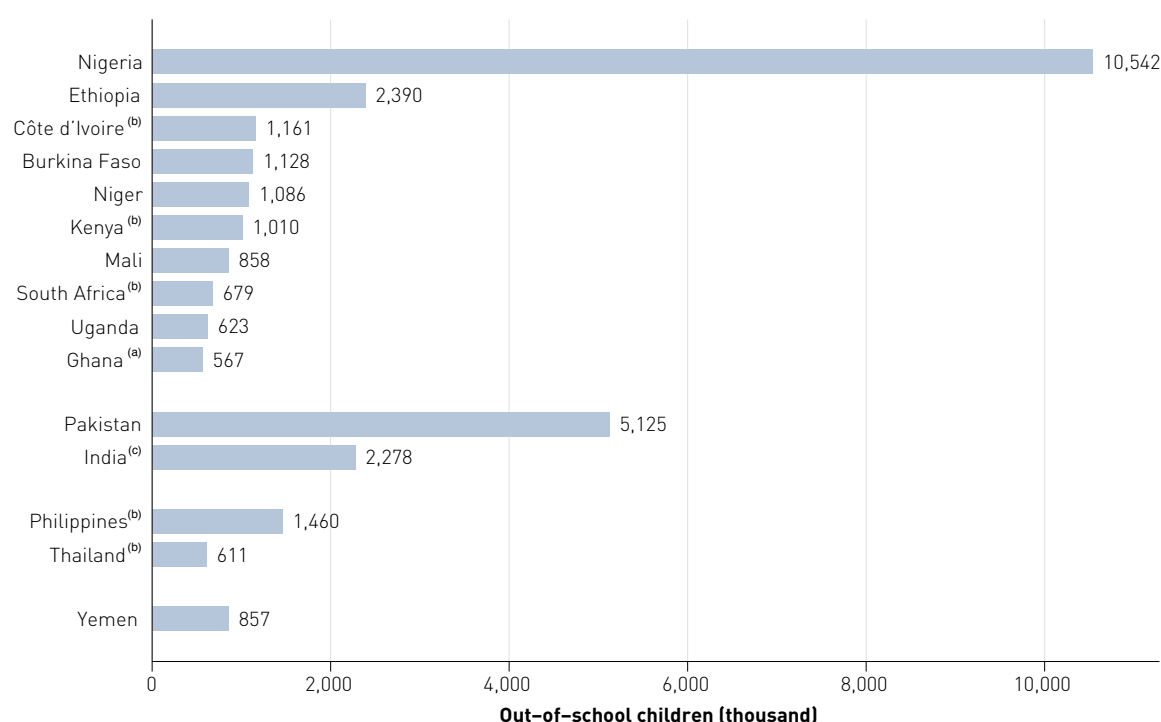
Other countries with more than 500,000 out-of-school children in 2010 are in South and West Asia (Pakistan and India), East Asia and the Pacific (Philippines and Thailand), and the Arab States (Yemen).

Have these children ever been to school? What are their chances of enrolling in the future?

Of the 61 million children who were out of school in 2010, 47% are expected to never enter school. A further 26% have attended but left school, and the remaining 27% are expected to enter school in the future (Figure 3).

Regional data show large variations in these patterns. In Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States, and South and West Asia, about half of all out-of-school children are expected to never enter school. In Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and Western Europe, and Central and Eastern Europe, most out-of-school children will start school late. East Asia and the Pacific, as well as South and West Asia, have a large share of early school leavers among their out-of-school populations.

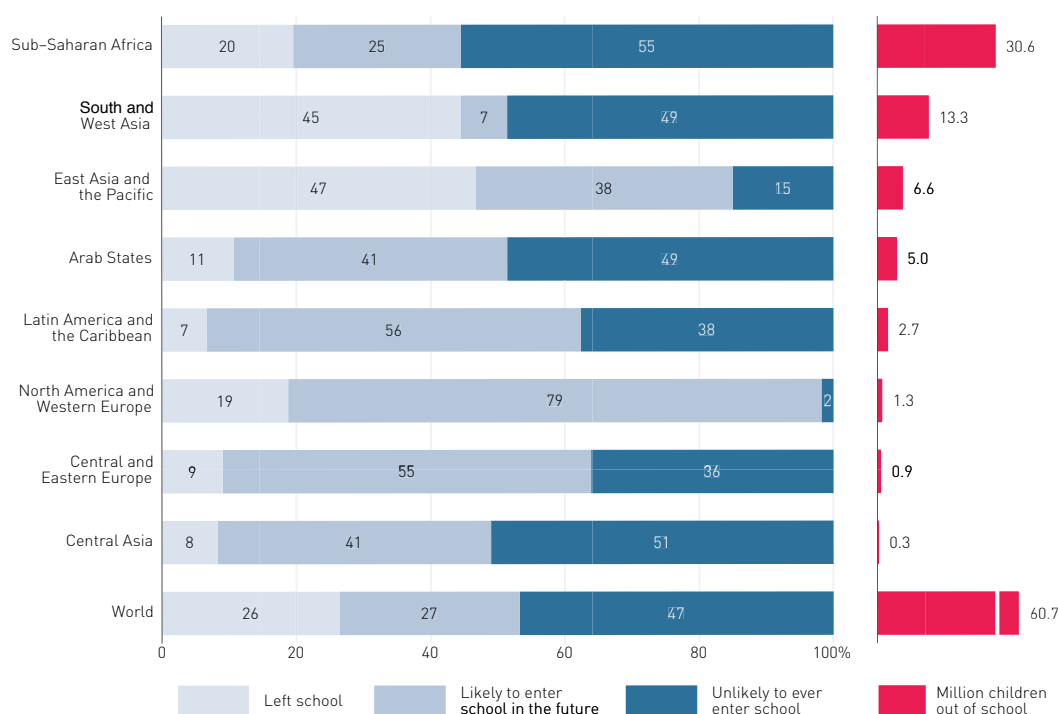
Figure 2: Countries with more than 500,000 children out of school, 2010



Notes: (a) Data for 2011; (b) Data for 2009; (c) Data for 2008. Figure presents selected countries with available data.

Source: UIS database, 2012.

Figure 3: School exposure of out-of-school children of primary school age by region, 2010



Source: UIS database, 2012.

The classification of out-of-school children by past and possible future school attendance yields important insights for policymakers. If the majority of out-of-school children in a country attended but left school, programmes and interventions should focus on reducing the dropout rate by improving the quality of education and addressing issues such as the direct and indirect costs of education. For children who are likely to attend school in the future, the goal is to ensure earlier entry into the education system. Children who are expected to never gain access to schooling – roughly 28 million of the global number out of school – pose the most serious challenges to policymakers. One of the first steps in reaching out-of-school children is to better identify who they are (see Box 1).

Gender, geography and socio-economic status: Which children are out-of-school?

In all countries, whatever their level of development, some individuals and groups experience extreme and persistent disadvantage in education. As well as being a sign of social deprivation in its own right, disadvantage in education is a cause and an effect of marginalization in other areas and a powerful transmitter of deprivation across generations.

In 2010, among countries with available data, 47 countries had more than 100,000 out-of-school children of primary school age. For 30 of these countries, which account for 34 million of

the 61 million out of school worldwide, data from nationally representative household surveys conducted between 2003 and 2010 were available for analysis.²

Box 1: Global initiative on out-of-school children

In 2009, UNICEF and the UIS launched a global initiative to provide the data required to inform policies aimed at reducing the number of out-of-school children. The specific objectives of the project are to:

- improve information and statistical analysis of data on out-of-school children and develop complex profiles of these children that reflect the multiple deprivations and disparities they face in relation to education; and
- analyse existing interventions related to enhanced school participation, identify bottlenecks and develop context-appropriate policies and strategies for increasing enrolment and attendance of excluded and marginalized children.

Twenty-six countries from seven regions are currently engaged in the initiative. It will result in country and regional studies, a global report on out-of-school children and a methodological document. The aim is to support education sector planning and reform efforts, as well as annual sector and budget reviews within the framework of the Global Partnership for Education.

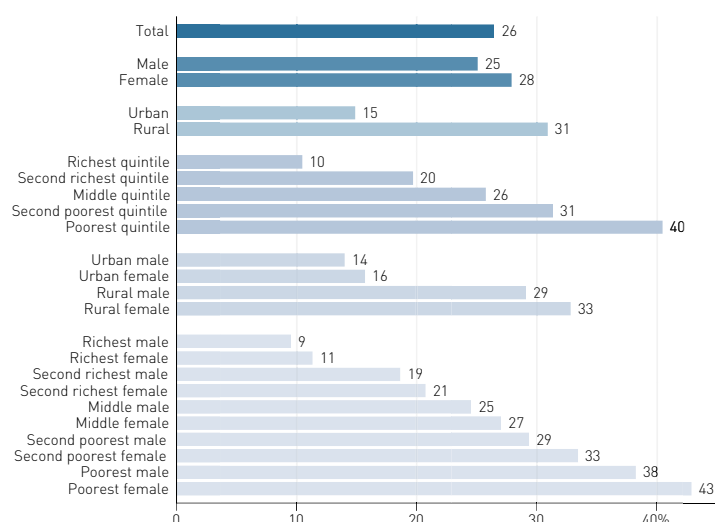
In these 30 countries, an average of 26% of all primary school-age children were out of school (Figure 4). Girls are more likely to be out of school (28%) than boys (25%). The gap between urban and rural areas is even wider. Rural children are twice as likely to be out of school as urban children. There is also a clear link between household wealth and the probability of not being in school. Compared with children from the richest quintile (20%) of households, children from the poorest quintile are four times more likely to be out of school. The probability of being out of school decreases steadily with increasing household wealth.

From a policymaking perspective, disaggregated data help to better identify those children most at risk of educational exclusion. For example, the combination of sex and location of residence reveals that girls from rural areas are more likely to be out of school than boys from rural areas and children of either sex from urban areas. The biggest disparity exists between rural girls and urban boys.

It is also important to consider the interaction between sex and household wealth. Within each wealth quintile, girls are always more likely to be out of school than boys, but the gap shrinks with increasing household wealth. Overall, the highest percentage of children out of school is observed among girls from the poorest household quintile (43%). Boys from the richest household quintile are the least likely to be out of school (9%).

The considerable wealth and gender divides become even more apparent when focusing on one of the 30 countries included in the dataset. In

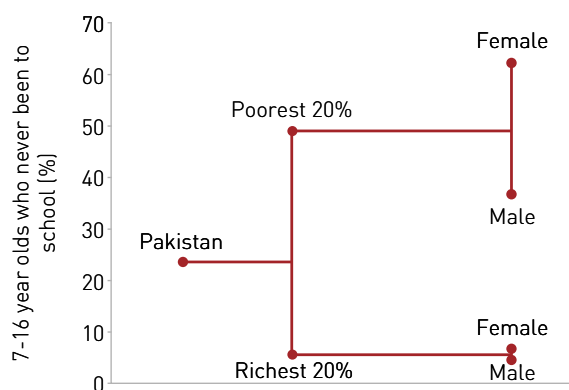
Figure 4: Average out-of-school rate by individual and household characteristics (in 30 countries)



Note: Mean values are unweighted.

Source: Household survey data from 30 countries, 2003-2010.

Figure 5: Share of population aged 7-16 who have never been, by wealth and gender, Pakistan 2007



Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report team analysis based on the 2007 Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (DHS)

Pakistan, for example, around one in four 7- to 16-year-olds had never been to school at all in 2007 and most will probably not have the chance to enter a classroom. It is the poorest females who are most likely to be excluded. While almost all of those in the richest households are able to go to school, whether boys or girls, around half of those from poorest households do not. Among the poorest girls, as many as two in three have never been to school.³

Five reasons why education must be at the forefront of Rio+20

While making sure every child can go to school is an imperative in itself, achieving universal education would also bring about far-reaching development benefits. Failing to further reduce the number of out-of-school children leaves millions in poverty, with bad health and lacking opportunities. The right to education is not just about education – it is a key right that unlocks other human rights and Millennium Development Goals. It must therefore be at the centre of any development agenda – and especially at the Rio+20 conference.⁴

1. Education reduces poverty and promotes economic growth

By making people more skilled and employable, education can provide an escape route from poverty. In low-income countries, an additional year of education adds about 10% to a person's income on average. The returns to education are highest for low-income countries, primary and secondary schooling and women.

Children from poor households are far more likely to drop out of school, or not enrol, than children from wealthier homes. In some countries, including Burkina Faso, Niger, Uganda and

Zambia, children from the poorest 20% of households are more than twice as likely to drop out as children from the wealthiest households.

Given that access to education can help people lift themselves out of poverty, it is vital that governments provide opportunities for the poorest to enrol. Increasing poor families' income can enhance education prospects. Several countries have introduced cash transfers with eligibility linked to school attendance.

Education can also boost economic growth. One study of 50 countries between 1960 and 2000 found that an additional year of schooling lifted GDP by 0.37% annually. The impact of improved cognitive skills was considerably larger, with the combined effect adding, on average, a full percentage point to annual GDP growth. Economic growth matters because it raises average income. By raising the productivity of the poor, more equitable education can increase overall growth and the share of growth that accrues to those below the poverty line.

2. Maternal education improves children's nutrition and chances of survival

Across the world, 26% of children less than 5 years-old are short for their age (stunted), and 19 million infants – 14% of all newborns – are delivered with low birth weight.⁵ Children of more educated mothers are less likely to be stunted or underweight due to malnutrition. Maternal education also lowers child mortality – each additional year of maternal education can reduce the risk of child death by 7% to 9%.

Sending every child to primary school would be an important first step. The benefits of every child going through to secondary school are enormous: If the average child mortality rate for sub-Saharan Africa were to fall to the level for children born to mothers with some secondary education, there would be 1.8 million fewer deaths – a 41% reduction. Since education is correlated with higher income – which in turn influences nutrition, for example, and access to clean water – it is difficult to isolate an 'education effect'. Nonetheless many studies find that maternal education has a statistically significant effect, even after controlling for other factors.

Educated mothers are also more likely to give birth in safe conditions. In Burkina Faso, for example, mothers with secondary education are twice as likely to give birth in health facilities as those with no education. In addition, women with education are far more likely to immunize their children and seek antenatal care. In Indonesia, for example,

child vaccination rates are 19% when mothers have no education and 68% when mothers have at least secondary school education.

3. Education helps fight HIV/AIDS and other diseases

About 1,000 children are infected with HIV every day – almost all of them during their mother's pregnancy, during childbirth or when they are being breastfed. These infections could be avoided if mothers knew more about how HIV is transmitted. Women with post-primary education are five times more likely than illiterate women to be educated about HIV and AIDS.

As figure 6 shows, only 59% of mothers with no formal education surveyed in 16 countries in sub-Saharan Africa knew that condoms could help reduce the spread of HIV. Among mothers who had completed primary school, 72% knew how important it is for their partners to use condoms. For mothers who had completed secondary school, the ratio was even higher – 81%. Similarly, awareness of mother-to-child transmission and the effects of anti-retroviral drugs increased with years of schooling. Although the strongest benefits are found in mothers who have completed secondary school, significant benefits also arise with the completion of primary school.

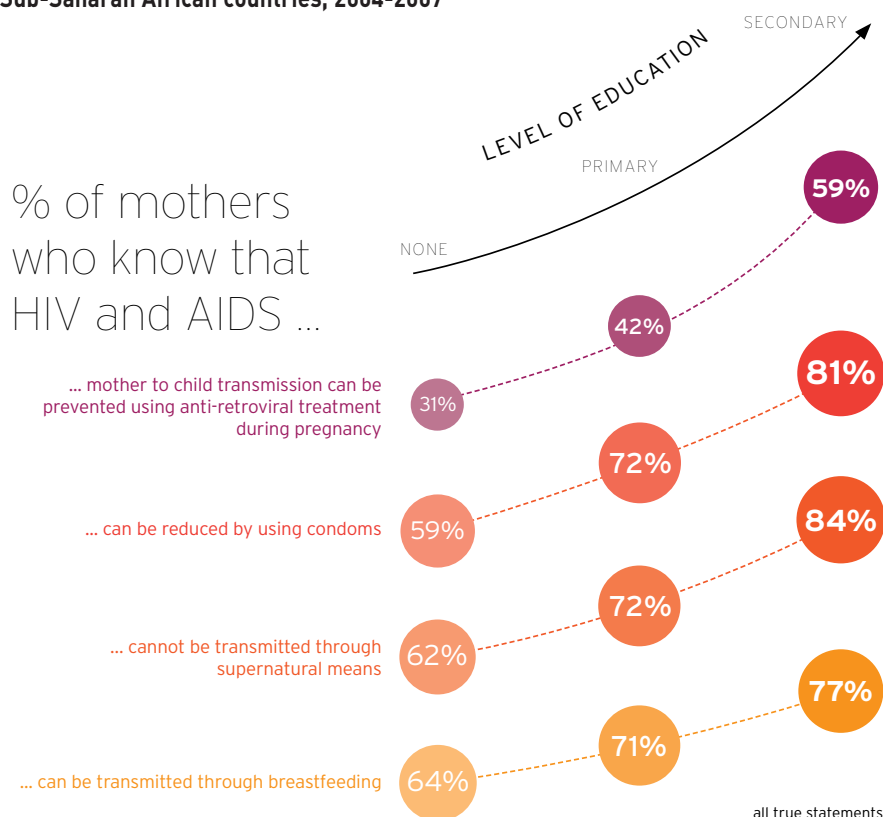
Education can also reduce the spread of HIV by promoting safer sexual behaviour. Evidence shows that sexual education addresses the structural factors that facilitate the spread of HIV, including lack of opportunity and gender inequality.⁶ In fact, the outcome of such education can be so beneficial that it is cost-saving for society to provide it.⁷

Education alone does not stop the spread of HIV, malaria and other life-threatening diseases, but neither does medicine alone. Without the awareness of the ways diseases are transmitted and of the means available to protect oneself and one's children, people will not be able to take advantage of medical care.

4. Education promotes gender equality

The majority of the world's out-of-school children – 53% – are girls. As a consequence of the historical gender bias in education, almost two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women. While some countries have made great progress towards gender parity in education, in 26 countries there are less than 9 girls per 10 boys in primary school. Investing in girls' education and reaching the goal of gender parity would enable gender equality elsewhere in society.

Figure 6: Percentage of female respondents answering questions on HIV and AIDS awareness, by education, selected Sub-Saharan African countries, 2004-2007



Source: 2011 EFA Global Monitoring Report

Education empowers women to make key decisions about their lives. For example, education plays a vital role in giving women more control over how many children they have. In Mali, for example, women with secondary education or higher have an average of three children – while those with no education have an average of seven. An extra year of female schooling reduces fertility rates by 10%.⁸

Giving girls equal access to school is also crucial to reach gender equality in the labour market. Although there is no simple association between the level of schooling and labour market outcomes, evidence from many countries shows that schooling increases an individual's chances of employment.

5. Education promotes democracy and participation in society

Education has effects far beyond the classroom. Through education, societies foster values, spread ideas and equip their citizens with skills for participation in society. As Nelson Mandela stated, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world".

Although there are examples of well-educated undemocratic societies, as well as poorly

educated well-functioning democracies, education is conducive to democracy. Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa shows that increasing access to primary school promotes citizen endorsement of democracy and rejection of non-democratic alternatives. People of voting age with a primary education were 1.5 times more likely to support democracy than people with no education – those who had completed secondary school were three times more likely. This evidence strongly suggests that investment in high-quality education may be among the most effective antidotes to autocracy and unaccountable governance.

One reason for this is that education helps people make informed judgements. For governments and populations facing challenges worldwide, an educated population is crucial. Education has a key role in fostering national and international support for the multilateral governance needed to address problems such as finance, trade, security and environmental sustainability.

A population with at least some understanding of the science behind climate change, for example, is more likely to support political solutions to the threat. The OECD'S 2006 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) found

that countries with high scientific literacy had higher awareness of environmental issues, and a stronger sense of responsibility for sustainable development.

Conclusion

These are five of the many reasons why education should be the centre of any development agenda – especially at the Rio+20 conference. The flip side of every potential development benefit of sending

children to school is that for the millions of children who are out of school, there are devastating effects. As the new data presented in this policy paper points out, these children are typically poor and rural. In other words, those who are missing out on these benefits are often those who need them the most.

The Education for All goals must remain at the top of the development agenda if we are to have any chance of reaching the wider targets of Rio+20 and the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

Notes

1. In 2011, UNESCO estimated that 67 million children of primary school age were out of school in 2009. In 2012, UNESCO revised its estimate for 2009 to 61 million children out of school, the same number as in 2010. The difference between the estimates published in 2011 and 2012 is largely due to revised estimates of the school-age population by the UN Population Division. The latest evidence shows that the numbers out of school have remained virtually unchanged between 2008 and 2010 (see Figure 1).

2. The data are from international household surveys conducted between 2003 and 2010: (1) Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS): Philippines 2003; Chad, Morocco, Turkey 2004; Ethiopia, Guinea, Senegal, 2005; Burkina Faso, India, Mali, Nepal, the Niger, Uganda 2006; Indonesia, Pakistan, Ukraine, Zambia 2007; Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria 2008; Kenya, Madagascar 2009; Colombia and United Republic of Tanzania 2010. (2) Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS): Cameroon, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire 2006; Mauritania 2007; Mozambique 2008. (3) *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostragem de Domicílios* (PNAD): Brazil 2006.

3. Data on disparities in access to education for 80 countries are available online via the Education for All Global Monitoring Report's Deprivation and Marginalization in Education (DME) dataset at www.unesco.org/en/efareport/dme.

4. The following discussion draws on sections of the 2009, 2010 and 2011 EFA Global Monitoring Reports. Unless otherwise is stated, all references to the evidence presented in this paper can be found in these Reports.

5. UNICEF. 2008. *The State of the World's Children 2009. Maternal and Newborn Health*. New York, UNICEF.

6. UNESCO. 2011. *UNESCO's Strategy for HIV and AIDS*. Paris, UNESCO.

7. UNESCO. 2011. *School-Based Sexuality Education Programmes: A Cost and Cost-Effectiveness Analysis in Six Countries*. Paris, UNESCO.

8. The World Bank. 2009. *Age at First Child: Does Education Delay Fertility Timing?* Policy Research Working paper 4

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