

# Education for All

S. L. Kiruthika



“Education is the key to the new global economy, from primary school on up to life-long learning. It is central to development, social progress and human freedom.”

From the Millennium Report

## Vital statistics

- ✓ The number of children in school rose significantly in the past decade, from 599 million in 1990 to 681 million in 1998.
- ✓ Since 1990, some 10 million more children go to school every year, which is nearly double the 1980-90 average.
- ✓ East Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean are now close to achieving universal primary education.
- ✓ The number of out-of-school children decreased from 127 million in 1990 to 113 million in 1998. In Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, the number of out of-school children was halved, from 11.4 million in 1990 to 4.8 million in 1998.
- ✓ The number of children in pre-school education has risen by 5 per cent in the past decade. Some 104 million children were enrolled in pre-primary establishments in 1998.
- ✓ The number of literate adults doubled from 1970 to 1998 from 1.5 billion to 3.3 billion. Today, 85 per cent of all men and 74 per cent of all women can read and write.
- ✓ Some 87 per cent of young adults (15-24 years old) are literate worldwide.
- ✓ Despite progress in actual numbers, illiteracy rates remain too high: at least 875 million adults remain illiterate, of which 63.8 per cent are women – exactly the same proportion as 10 years ago.

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**Jayanthi College of Education Seminar on *Current Perspectives on Education***

Editors: P. Udayakumar, M.Sc., M.Phil., M.Ed., M.A., Ph.D. Candidate,

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## **Why is education important?**

Imagine girls who are not allowed to go to school just because they are girls. Imagine abandoned children or demobilized boy soldiers, with little or no schooling, living on the street, without work or safe shelter. Imagine sick babies, dying because their mothers cannot read the prescription on the medicine bottle, or a farmer, losing his ancestral land because he cannot read the legal documents.

Basic education is, and always has been, the key to freedom from subjugation, fear and want. Education is an effective weapon to fight poverty. It saves lives and gives people the chance to improve their lives. It gives people a voice. And it increases a nations' productivity and competitiveness, and is instrumental for social and political progress.

## **What is basic education?**

Basic education is more than just learning how to read, write and calculate. It encompasses the broadest possible sense of learning -- formal, non-formal and informal -- and at any stage of life. Learning takes place in and out of school -- in the home, the local community, the workplace, and in recreational and other settings. Not confined to childhood and the formative years, it extends from infancy throughout the whole of life.

## **What exactly does basic education mean?**

Basic refers to the competencies, knowledge, attitudes, values and motivations that are deemed necessary in order for people to become fully literate and to have developed the educational foundations for a lifelong learning journey.

Basic education is not a fixed or clear-cut concept and most countries have chosen to restrict 'basic' to primary schooling, meaning the first stage of formal schooling. 'Basic', in an increasing number of countries, however, now encompasses junior secondary schooling and in other it extends to a full secondary education.

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China, for example, is shifting the focus for much of the country from the primary school to the nine years compulsory school, preceded by a variety of early childhood care and education programmes.

In Brazil, a law adopted in 1996 defined the whole system from day care provision to the end of secondary schooling as 'basic'. Throughout Europe, North America, Australia, Japan and parts of South East Asia, 'basic' includes both primary and secondary levels.

In a small but growing number of countries, some kind of post secondary or tertiary education is almost becoming 'basic' in that it is seen as a foundation for working life or further studies for all youth.

### **Shifting the focus from quantity to quality**

Education for all is not the same thing as quality education for all. Today, it is widely agreed that it is not enough to put children into school, they also have to learn something relevant and stay in school. Most countries, including countries with large populations such as Bangladesh, Brazil, China and Mexico, are now talking about quality, a concept that covers everything from the physical condition of schools to better teacher training, from the availability of textbooks to more parental involvement.

The need for improving the efficiency of education systems is urgent. Today, in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa less than three out of four pupils reach fifth grade. In terms of measuring efficiency, their school systems are wasting up to a third of their resources on repeaters and drop-outs. In fact, a quarter of the 96 million pupils who entered school for the first time in 1995 are likely to abandon their schooling before fifth grade. By failing to be sensitive to the needs of many ordinary and low-achieving pupils, schools cease to be truly open and accessible to all.

### **Education, not Discrimination**

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Girl's education makes all the difference, not only in terms of economic development but human development. However, in today's world, girls continue to be systematically more disadvantaged than boys solely on the basis of discrimination by gender. Sixty per cent of the 110 million children out of school in developing nations are girls. The gender gap continues to be unacceptably wide despite the fact that the education of girls and women is now on policy-making agendas in most developing nations and the fact that 44 million more girls attend primary schools in developing countries than in 1990.

Basic education for girls does pay off in a number of ways:

- ❖ Literate women tend to marry later and are more likely to use family planning methods.
- ❖ Life expectancy at birth rises because children with literate parents are more likely to survive infancy.
- ❖ Family income rises as literate parents tend to have fewer children and are more likely to find better-paying jobs.
- ❖ Literate workers are more productive as they are more likely to seek ways to improve their work

### **Writing off debt to fund education**

The impact of foreign debt is one of the principal reasons education budgets suffer in many developing countries. While investing in education yields major long-term benefits, governments face pressing short-term demands for resources to service foreign debt payments. Falling into arrears has an immediate negative effect on a country's ability to raise credit or pay for its imports. Yet at the global level, there is a strong cost-benefit argument to be made for writing off at least some international debt and using those resources to invest in education, at a time when overseas aid from rich to poor countries is declining.

The 1996 Heavily-Indebted Poor Countries debt relief initiative supported by the World Bank and a group of wealthy countries acknowledged the social cost of structural adjustment policies. The G8 meeting of some of the world's richest countries in Cologne in 1999 widened

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its scope. Yet many argue that debt relief is still moving too slowly, is too bureaucratic, and is too restricted by special conditions.

### **New challenges in education**

Daunting challenges are facing the Education for All movement in the future: how to reach out with education to HIV/AIDS victims in regions such as Africa where the pandemic is reaping havoc in terms of teacher loss, orphaned pupils and teacher and pupil absenteeism; how to extend education to the increasing number of refugees and displaced people; how to help teachers acquire a new understanding of their roles and how to harness the new technologies to benefit the poor.

And probably the most daunting challenge of all – in a world with 700 million people living in 42 highly indebted countries – how to help education overcome poverty and give millions of children a chance to realize their full potential.

What is needed most is additional resources. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his Millennium Report, notes that providing primary education for the 130 million children in developing countries who do not now enjoy it would add an estimated \$7 billion a year to educational costs over a 10-year period.

What are needed are not just schools. “Schools must be accessible, have qualified teachers and offer such amenities as textbooks and supplies for the poor.”

The Secretary-General has set very specific goals: to demonstrably narrow the gender gap in primary and secondary education by 2005; to ensure that by 2015, all children everywhere -- boys and girls alike -- will be able to complete primary schooling “Implementing these goals will require all our sensitivity, imagination, and determination. It will, indeed, be a test of our entire international community,” Mr. Annan told the World Education Forum, held in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000.

### **Education for all: The building blocks**

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1948: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the United Nations. Education is declared a basic right of all people.

1959: The Declaration on the Rights of the Child. Education is declared a right of every child.

1966: The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination proclaimed the right of all to education, regardless of race or ethnicity.

1981: The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women called for the elimination of discriminating against women and for equal rights in education.

1990: The World Declaration on Education for All, adopted at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, defined a bold new direction in education, declaring that "Every person – child, youth and adult – shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs".

1993: The E-9 Education Summit where governments from the world's nine high population countries pledged to universalize primary education and significantly reduce illiteracy in their respective countries by the year 2000.

1996: The Amman Affirmation adopted at the Mid-decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All, called for accelerated efforts to meet the goals of Education for All set in 1990.

1996: The report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century promoted a holistic view of education consisting of four “pillars”: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together. The text was widely adopted

2000: The Dakar Framework for Action, adopted at the World Education Forum (26-28 April 2000, Dakar, Senegal) commits governments to achieve quality basic education for all by 2015, with a particular emphasis on girls' education, and a pledge from donor countries and

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institutions that "no country seriously committed to basic education will be thwarted in the achievement of this goal by lack of resources."

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