

II.

PRIMARY EDUCATION:

Significant Progress and the Unfinished Road

Increased demand has been at the heart of the education issue throughout the developing world, particularly in the case of primary education. Over the last 45 years, primary enrollment rates have risen dramatically in developing countries. In 1960, fewer than half of the developing world's children aged 6 to 11 were enrolled in primary school. By 2002, the world average for net primary enrollment reached 81 percent. Within this average, the percentage of net primary enrollment varies by region. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the primary net enrollment rate is approximately 95 percent. In South Asia it is 74 percent, and in sub-Saharan Africa it is 59 percent.¹ In Uganda, a national push for universal primary education caused the gross enrollment ratio for primary school to jump from 69 percent in 1990 and 80 percent in 1996, to 124 percent in 1997.²

Gender parity is possible, but it is not yet the global norm

Along with increases in overall enrollment, the gender gap in developing countries' primary enrollment rates has narrowed considerably over the last two decades.³ UNESCO's 2002 EFA Global Monitoring Report notes that 86 countries have achieved gender parity in primary enrollment. In the 1990s, two-thirds of developing countries improved on primary girls' enrollment, with Bangladesh,

1 UNICEF. *State of the World's Children 2004*. New York, 2003.

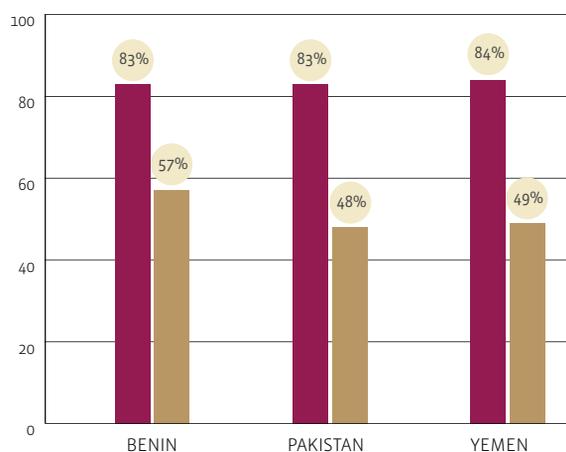
2 Kirungi, Fred. "Uganda Tackling School Bottlenecks." Africa Recovery Online: A United Nations Publication." Last accessed 15 June 2006. <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec/vol14no2/uganda.htm>. The 124 percent refers to the presence of primary school children who are overage.

3 Gender gaps measure the difference between boys' and girls' participation in education. It is possible to examine gender gaps in enrollment, attendance, learning achievement — as measured by testing, grades, etc. — and completion/survival of the school cycle — as measured by graduation. Most often, analysts study the gender gap in enrollment rates because enrollment data is the most commonly reported education data. In addition to examining the gender gap in enrollment, however, it also is important to take into account the gender gaps in learning achievement and school completion, given that they provide more in-depth information about the learning that takes place in schools.

GENDER GAPS IN THREE COUNTRIES 2000 Net Primary School Enrollment

Data Source:
UNICEF, 2005

Male Female



Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, and Nepal demonstrating the greatest improvements. Some countries, such as Morocco, made remarkable progress in girls' enrollment rates in a short time period — primary girls' enrollment increased from 45 percent in 1997–98 to 82 percent in 2002–03.⁴ Despite the progress made in reducing gender gaps by many countries, 31 of the 196 countries in the world are at high risk of not achieving gender parity in primary enrollment rates even by 2015. The majority of them are in sub-Saharan Africa.

In South Asia, Pakistan has the lowest net primary enrollment rate at 46 percent, and the number of out-of-school children is 13 million (out of 50 million children of aged 5–9 years). There are greater gender disparities as well. Girls' educational attainment in Pakistan continues to lag behind the level of education attained by boys. This is seen in school enrollment figures and in literacy levels, which reveal that large numbers of girls have limited access to even basic schooling. The overall literacy rate in Pakistan is 43 percent, but it is alarmingly low at just 18 percent for rural females.⁵ The most

⁴ UNICEF. Morocco, 2005.

⁵ Pirzado, Parvez, and Saeed Nasim. "Developing Leaders of Education in Thar Desert Area, Pakistan." Paper presented at the 8th Global Leadership Forum, Istanbul, Turkey. The Agha Khan University, Institute for Educational Development, June 2006.

serious gender gaps in Pakistan are in the rural regions of the country. A 2003 baseline survey conducted by Thardeep Rural Development Program, a local Pakistani NGO, revealed that in the Tharparkar district, the educational facilities for girls are far less than the one for boys, and that out of 3,676 primary schools in the district, only 447 are girls.⁶

Enrollment: Only half the story

The increased demand for primary education since the advent of efforts such as EFA demonstrates the inherent value of this investment, from the children who benefit to the economies that will benefit from their contribution. But enrollment only tells half the story. It explains who enters but does not reveal who advances, succeeds, and completes schooling. Survival and completion rates are key elements that, with the enabling learning achievement element, make up the rest of the picture and show whether children remain in school.⁷ The survival and completion rates for girls are lower than the ones for boys. There are several reasons why this is the case:

- Children, especially girls, are often sent home if their parents are unable to pay school fees.
- Girls face pressure to drop out to fulfill household responsibilities.
- Ineffective teaching methods resulting in poor educational quality affect girls more than boys.
- The lack of relevance of what is being taught to the daily lives of the communities has a greater impact on girls' survival in school and completion of the primary cycle.

The 2006 EFA Conference on Business and Education notes, "These dropouts represent a squandering of resources and children's time, because many probably have not learned enough to make an impact on their lives."⁸ The picture in Uganda illuminates this reality, where in some rural districts, "girls account for only 35 percent of total primary school enrollment. This is

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Survival rates measure the percentage of children starting the primary or secondary school cycle who eventually attain the last grade of that cycle. Completion rates measure the total number of students successfully completing the last year of primary or secondary school, expressed as a proportion of the total number of children of official primary or secondary school graduation age. Survival rates are a better indication of the quality of education and related issues, as they focus on children who actually enroll and reach the last grade of an education cycle.

⁸ Academy for Educational Development. "Education for All: Opportunity for Public-Private Partnerships." Report for 2006 Conference on Business and Education. Draft, 18 July 2006.

partly because girls drop out at a much higher rate than boys. While the gender gap in enrollment between boys and girls is only 1.1 percent in the first grade, by the seventh it reaches 15.7 percent.”⁹

The completion rates for sub-Saharan Africa are the lowest in the world. There, 19 countries have a completion rate of less than 50 percent, meaning that at least every second child does not complete primary school.¹⁰ In six African countries, only about one in three children will complete primary: Niger, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso, Chad, Burundi, and Mali.¹¹

9 Kirungi, Fred. “Uganda Tackling School Bottlenecks.” Africa Recovery Online: A United Nations Publication. Last accessed 15 June 2006. <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec/vol14no2/uganda.htm>.

10 UNESCO. “How Many Children in Africa Reach Secondary Education?” UNESCO Institute for Statistics Fact Sheet. January 2006. Last accessed 14 June 2006. http://www.uis.unesco.org/TEMPLATE/pdf/EducGeneral/UIS_Fact%20Sheet_2006_02_SecAfr_EN.pdf.

11 Ibid.