



INTERNATIONAL
**YEAR of
YOUTH**
AUGUST 2010-2011
OUR YEAR OUR VOICE

Dialogue and Mutual Understanding

Fact Sheet: Youth and Education

- 11% of the world's youth (15-24 years old) are non-literate.
- Data from 2005-2008 indicates that in developing countries, the percentage of non-literate youth is 13%, with Sub-Saharan Africa's percentage standing at 29%.
- By 2015, youth non-literacy rates are projected to fall to 8% for the world and to 9% in developing countries as a whole. However, youth non-literacy rates in sub-Saharan Africa are projected to decline only slightly, lingering at 24%.
- In 2008, almost 74 million adolescents (10-19 years old) were not in school of any type. This represents 1 in 5 adolescents (1 in 3 in sub-Saharan Africa).
- As of 2008, 1 in 3 adolescents (10-19 years old) are still in primary school.
- Vulnerable young people are often excluded from educational systems. Inclusive policies are needed to ensure access to education for poorest youth in cities and remote areas, youth affected with HIV, refugee youth, and migrant youth.
- Commitments made at the international level, including the World Programme of Action for Youth, the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All goals, identify education as a key priority area for action.

Introduction

Education is central to development and to the improvement of the lives of young people globally, and as such has been identified as a priority area in internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals and the World Programme of Action for Youth. Education is important in eradicating poverty and hunger and in promoting sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development. Increased efforts towards education accessibility, quality and affordability are central to global development efforts.

Despite significant improvements in increasing primary school enrolment in some regions, the Millennium Development Goal of achieving universal primary level education by 2015 is unlikely to be met. Moreover, such improvements have not necessarily been followed by an equivalent transition to secondary education, vocational training, non-formal education or entry into the labour market, especially for girls and young women.

Worldwide 11% of young people are non-literate, lacking basic numerical and reading skills, and as such lack the means to be able to sustain a living through full and decent employment. With youth unemployment and underemployment at persistently high levels worldwide, and with many young working poor lacking even primary-level education, such youth unemployment and underemployment rates act to jeopardize social inclusion, cohesion and stability.





There is a need to align education policies, curricula and training programmes in a people-centric way, with national development priorities and needs, international development strategies and labour market requirements. Doing so will promote the situation of young people, fight extreme poverty, and allow for a maximization of the benefits of globalization for youth.

The persistent gender gap in education hinders youth development. Gender inequity in education is characterized by, among other things, lack of access to and availability of gender-sensitive educational infrastructure, materials and training programmes, as well as a high dropout rate amongst secondary school aged girls.

Knowledge and education are key factors to the full and effective participation of youth in the processes of social, economic and political development. Increased attention to improving participation rates of young people, particularly marginalized youth, is needed to ensure that they acquire the knowledge, capacities, skills and ethical values needed to fulfill their role as agents of development, good governance, social inclusion, tolerance and peace.

Greater focus on universal access to education, quality education, human rights education and learning, as well as increased access to the complementary nature of vocational, formal, informal, and non-formal educational practices in a non discriminatory manner, particularly for young women, is key for young people to be able to address their aspirations and challenges, fulfill their potential, and influence current and future social and economic conditions and opportunities.

United Nations and Education

Obtaining universal education is a priority for the United Nations system. In 1995 governments committed to the World Programme of Action for Youth and identified education among its 15 priority. In doing so, they highlighted the need for 'improving the level of basic education, skill training and literacy among all youth, including young women and youth in distressed circumstances.'

In addition, at the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal, 2000), 164 governments pledged to achieve "Education for All" (EFA) by launching a world movement to meet the basic learning needs of all children, youth and adults. Participants at the Forum identified six goals to be met by 2015, with young people being the focus of Goal 3: 'Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults'.

The goal commits countries to ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes. However, the realization of all six goals provides the best opportunity and environment for youth to benefit from education.





At the 62nd session of the General Assembly in 2007, the critical role of both formal and non-formal education in the achievement of poverty eradication and other development goals was reiterated. Also emphasized was the need for basic education and training for eradicating illiteracy; the importance of commitment in striving for expanded secondary and higher education, especially for girls and young women; and the creation of human resources and infrastructure capabilities and the empowerment of those living in poverty.

The United Nations primarily concentrates its efforts in education in five key areas: promoting policy dialogue, monitoring progress, carrying out advocacy, developing capacities and mobilizing funding. To achieve its aims, the United Nations promotes education through many instruments, agencies and funds, including through the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Bank. These agencies are co-convenors of the EFA movement, which is led by UNESCO, and work together with governments as well as with entities such as non-governmental organizations, research organizations and the private sector. In addition, the UN has adopted a range of measures to further education, such as the UN Literacy Decade (2003-2012), the UN Girls' Education Initiative, and the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014).

Progress

Primary school enrolment has increased significantly worldwide and has led to rising demand for secondary schooling. Sub-Saharan Africa's secondary school enrolment rates have increased by 40% from 1999 to 2008, and the number of out-of-school children decreased by about 13 million between 1999 and 2009. Despite this, the uptake in secondary and tertiary education remains low, particularly in developing regions, where many young people receive little or no education after primary level as a result of inadequate infrastructure, lack of opportunities, affordability and accessibility.

In terms of tertiary education, much of the growth in enrolment has occurred in East Asia and the Pacific, and not in sub-Saharan Africa or South and West Asia. These regional inequalities can be demonstrated also by the estimates of literacy rates. Between 1994 and 2008, the number of non-literate youth (15-24 years) declined from almost 170 million to 130 million, and is projected to fall to 99 million by 2015 – more than half of these will be young women. However, in sub-Saharan Africa, the percentage of non-literate young people stood at 29% in 2008.

It is clear that many education and training systems are not adequately preparing students to meet the demands of a globalized world. The *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011* indicates that despite progress towards the EFA goals, millions of children are graduating from primary school





with reading, writing and numeracy skills far below expected levels. Too often, the quality of secondary education is weak and the content is not relevant for young people.

The persistence of youth unemployment and under-employment suggests that mechanisms for anticipating skills needs and developing skills are not functioning to the level necessary.

The Way Forward

Enhancing the Quality of Education and Training

Although there has been progress in reaching universal primary education and an expansion of equitable access to education, this progress has often not been accompanied by necessary provisions for ensuring quality, resulting in minimal impact on the lives of learners and decreased opportunities for social participation. Poor quality education is more common among disadvantaged segments of societies, with education being poorly adapted to the cultural and linguistic contexts of particular groups. Equally important, poor quality education and training deny young people employment opportunities as well as the resultant earnings and improved quality of life. Ultimately, poor quality education risks reinforcing inequalities and sustaining inter-generational poverty and marginalization.

Increased efforts are needed to ensure that education at primary, secondary and tertiary level is respondent to the needs of young people and the realities in which they live, so as to adequately equip them for participation in social and economic life. Scaled up efforts to ensure quality teacher training, the development of appropriate and gender sensitive learning materials, safe educational environments, including efforts to eliminate bullying, and delivery of education in an equitable, gender sensitive and violent free manner are the cornerstones of providing an education for all.

The development of policies and programmes to increase the use of ICT in education should be strengthened and recognized for its importance in the provision and evaluation of education, as well as an invaluable skill for young people.

Promoting Non Formal and Informal Education

Many education and training systems do not provide young people with the basic skills needed to escape poverty and unemployment, even when they continue to receive formal education. Non-formal education programmes seek to fill this gap by providing learning and skills development opportunities that are relevant to the context in which young people live and seek their livelihoods. Often provided through youth and community based organizations, non-formal education facilitates the learning of life-relevant knowledge and skills, especially for disadvantaged and marginalized groups.





Non-formal education should not be seen as an alternative to formal education, but rather recognized for its complementariness in providing a more fully rounded and skills based approach, equipping youth to meet the competing demands of work and personal life.

Using Different Learning Settings to Expand Skills Acquisition for the World of Work

Programmes to equip young people with the skills for the world of work must provide technical and vocational education and training (TVET), combining classroom education with workplace training, and technical training with entrepreneurship awareness. Otherwise, young people find it difficult to find a job, to stay in employment, to move on in the workplace, and, more broadly, to succeed in lifelong learning.

TVET programmes frequently provide training for a specific job, yet employment opportunities require adaptability. Hence, increasing employability requires consideration of both short- and long-term perspectives, enabling young people to seize immediate employment opportunities while also equipping them with the ability to continue learning and be able to adjust to changes in the workplace and career opportunities. The private sector also has both a key role to play, and a great interest, in providing youth with the relevant knowledge, skills and values they need, for example through on-the-job training and internships. The past twenty years have been marked by the emergence of new and innovative forms of collaboration between public and private actors in the area of education.

Providing Alternative Learning Opportunities to Vulnerable Youth

Sustainable and shared economic development increasingly depends on the capacity of governments to implement targeted policies to reach marginalized groups and remove barriers to ongoing learning and entry into the labour market. Notwithstanding the significant achievements over the past decade, women and girls still have less access to education and training, and specific policies are urgently needed to address these challenges.

Young people who drop out of school early are vulnerable to unemployment, poverty, teen marriage, pregnancy, and partaking in risky behaviours. In addition to preventing young people from dropping out of school, alternative learning opportunities that take into account the reasons why they are not in school are needed. These reasons usually include income poverty, gender, disability, family catastrophes, social conflicts and wars, as well as perceived low market returns to education. The challenge is to give these young people appropriate opportunities to consolidate their basic knowledge and competencies, and equip them with the relevant skills needed to find a job, set up a business or engage in other productive work.

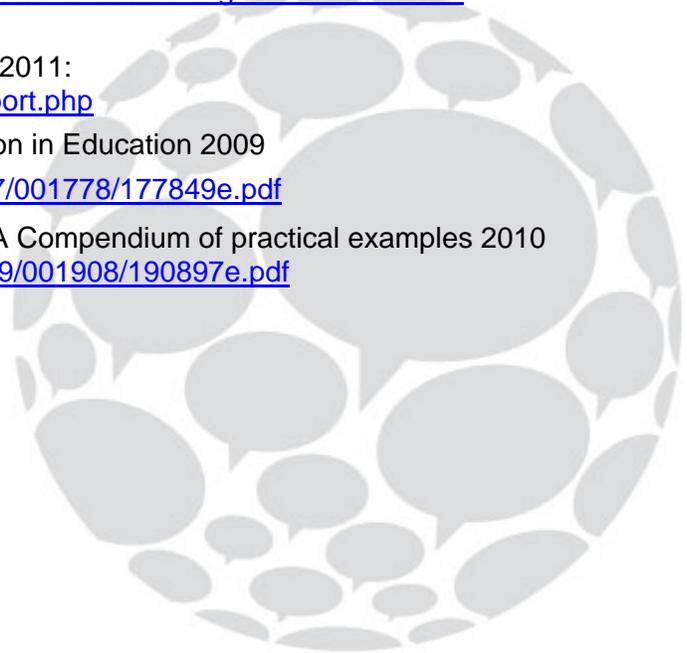
For Further Reading

- World Programme of Action for Youth : <http://social.un.org/index/Youth/WorldProgrammeofActionforYouth.aspx>
- UNESCO education website: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/>
- UNESCO youth website: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/social-transformations/youth/>





- UNESCO Institute for Statistics: Out-Of-School Children: New Data Reveal Persistent Challenges
http://www.uis.unesco.org/FactSheets/Documents/FS12_2011_OOSC_EN.pdf
- UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education 1960
http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/DISCRI_E.PDF
- Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights General Comment 13 The Right to Education
<http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/ae1a0b126d068e868025683c003c8b3b?Opendocument>
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>
- Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments 2000 http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/framework.shtml
- the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), The Belém Framework for Action 2009 <http://www.unesco.org/en/confinteavi/belem-framework-for-action/>
- 2011 Education for All Global Monitoring Report:
<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/>
- UNICEF State of the World's Children 2011:
<http://www.unicef.org/sowc2011/fullreport.php>
- UNESCO Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education 2009
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001778/177849e.pdf>
- Implementing the Right to Education: A Compendium of practical examples 2010
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001908/190897e.pdf>



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