MDGs Follow-up Meeting (June 2-3, 2011)
Breakout session 2: Accelerating Progress in Education
Resource Paper

Abstract

1. The access to basic education has improved remarkably, thanks to the synthesized efforts of the respective countries and the international community. Growing attention has also been paid to other aspects of basic education although there are still issues to be tackled for further progress. The following paper outlines the current status and efforts made to overcome problems in two main areas: **quality of and equity in education**.

Improving Quality of Education (pages 1-8)

2. Goal 6 of the Dakar Framework for Action commits to "improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that **recognized and measurable learning outcomes** are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills". Current international discussions on the quality of education are frequently guided according to these agreements.
3. The indicators to assess the quality of education such as pupil-teacher ratio, pupil-textbook ratio, ratio of qualified teachers and expenditure per pupil are improving in many developing countries. Still, **there are notable gaps in students' learning outcomes between developing and high-income countries,** as demonstrated in the results of international tests such as TIMSS, PISA and SACMEQ.
4. As to the exact causes of such disparities, existing data does not provide us with a clear picture. First of all, **there is no simple correlation between various forms of inputs into education systems and students' learning outcomes.** Moreover, test results of cognitive achievement do not say anything about the non-cognitive aspects of educational quality.
5. To improve students' learning outcomes, the **process of education** is vitally important. In that sense, **improving teachers' capacity and commitment is one of the most fundamental interventions** to link the inputs into educational systems with the learning outcomes. For example, an approach of using teachers' peer-learning and school-based lesson study has proved to be an effective means of improving teachers' subject knowledge, pedagogy and motivation.
6. Another essential means to improve the educational process is to **involve community members in the decision-making at the school level**. Much evidence confirms that this approach has a potential of bringing about positive effects that are conducive for quality teaching and learning to take place. This will in turn require **efficient and responsible structure of administrative support for schools at the local level**.
7. A whole variety of factors contribute to quality education such as ECCE,

secondary and tertiary education, as well as the relationship with the labor market. To maximize the effect, a holistic approach will be required to make sure that these factors will be collectively geared towards improving quality of education.

Discussion points on Quality of Education

Definition and scope

- Should we establish a common standard for and means of measuring educational outcomes? If so, what purposes should it serve?
- Can we generalize a success model for improving the quality of education when learner characteristics, school processes and contexts vary by country and by school?
- What initiatives are known to be effective for non-cognitive educational outcomes, such as life skills, creativity, sense of citizenship, cultivation of values, etc.?

Teachers

- For effective teacher training, what should be done and how? Teacher enthusiasm is very important, but how can it be encouraged? What works for developing teachers' capacity for a better teaching-learning process?

School autonomy and community participation

- What are the strengths and challenges of involving parents and communities for improving quality of education? How can a decentralized school management work to improve quality of education?

Linkages with other sectors

- What kind of good practices do we have that can address the inter-related and multi-sectoral nature of quality?

Ensuring Equity in Education (pages 9-18)

8. In order to tackle the issue of equity, it would be necessary for each country to appropriately **grasp who are 'out-of-school' and what are the barriers to their education**. Collection of adequate data and continuous monitoring are preconditions to effective intervention to promote equity in education.
9. **Free primary education (FPE) policies have made a significant impact on increasing enrolment of the disadvantaged. However, it is not sufficient to ensure equity only in access to education**. It should also be noted that free primary education policies have potentially negative effects. These include the lowered quality of education and the exclusion of the disadvantaged population when cash or other forms of contributions are demanded under other names instead of 'school fees'.
10. **It is important to supplement this FPE policy with other evidence-based measures which remove barriers both within and outside education systems**. Such interventions include scholarships, quota systems, school

meals, subsidies, cash grants and food for education.

11. MDGs Goal 3 specifically highlights the importance of eliminating gender disparity, which has an implication to the field of education. In this context, support for the schooling of girls has been prioritized and has required continuous commitment. **Accelerated interventions that support countries moving beyond gender parity to gender equity, as well as the gender empowerment, are also needed.**
12. The disadvantages are often multilayered. In addition to gender, schools have excluded school-aged populations who have difficulty accessing schools for various reasons: distance to school, cultural and language differences, poverty, and mental and physical disabilities. **Inclusive education in its widest sense will be required to ensure equity in education.**
13. Key challenges in attempts to move from specifically targeted interventions to inclusive interventions include insufficient teacher training on special needs education, large class size and discrimination towards the disadvantaged populations. These should be tackled by creating new forms of working school environment and work ethics of teachers that are gender-sensitive and more broadly responsive to the various special needs and social contexts. **Adequate teacher training and awareness that introduce child centered approaches among stakeholders on special needs are necessary to realize inclusive education for all.**

Discussion Points on Equity in Education

- How can we identify and monitor disadvantaged groups? How can we establish a data monitoring system for out of school children?
- What kind of policies and programs need to supplement the free primary education policy in order for the disadvantaged children to come to and continue quality schooling?
- What should we do to promote inclusive education to achieve EFA? How can inclusive education realistically work in the settings of developing countries? What kind of policy interventions should be prioritized for cost-effective implementation of inclusive education?
- What kinds of good practices do we have that can address the cross-cutting and inter-related nature of equity?

Resource Paper on Improving the Quality of Education

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1. Introduction: What has been discussed about the Quality of Education?

Over the last decade, significant progresses have been made in access to and participation in primary education, leading to growing attention being paid to the quality of education. This is evident in the debates and efforts at international, country and school levels. Although the notion of quality has been conceived in a variety of ways, international development platforms provide a useful framework for a joint undertaking. Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2 (i.e. Achieve Universal Primary Education) targets that all children will "complete a full course of primary schooling" by 2015. Education for All (EFA) Goal 2 makes reference to the importance of quality by stating that all children shall "have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality" while EFA Goal 6 commits ourselves to "improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills". Current international discussions on the quality of education are thus guided accordingly by these platforms.

Repeated efforts have been made to reach a common understanding about the quality of education. At a philosophical level, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that education "shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" (Article 26, 1948). Policy makers at times regarded quality as a competitor of quantity/access to limited financial resources. Recently however, it is more widely accepted that quantity and quality are intertwined and should not be treated as a trade-off. In addition, efficiency – maximizing output with a given input – may be included in the discussion of quality. In basic education, internal efficiency (minimizing repetition and dropout rates) is more often discussed than external efficiency (graduates finding relevant jobs).

Cognitive development and the accumulation of skills, attitudes and values are important objectives of education systems (GMR 2005:35). This emerging consensus derives in part from an idea promulgated through the Delors commission's report about the four pillars of education - *learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together* and *learning to be*. Education of good quality is therefore expected to achieve these objectives.

Systems have been developed and used to monitor, assess and compare the quality

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of education. These are used to continuously improve teaching and learning processes in the classroom, to examine the extent of learning achievement of individual pupils or to assess the effectiveness of education systems. Regionally, such systems include the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), the Program on the Analysis of Education Systems **(**PASEC**)** for Francophone Sub-Saharan African countries, and the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE). There is also an increasing number of developing countries that are participating in the international assessments such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

For the specific purpose of monitoring the progress towards achieving MDG 2, the United Nations has listed three official indicators: (1) net enrolment ratio in primary education, (2) proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach last grade of primary, and (3) literacy rate of 15 to 24 year-olds, women and men. Of these, the first one relates to access to education, while the second indicator is a proxy for the quality of education as children who have not learned sufficiently are thought likely to drop out of the system, and the third indicates the educational achievement of the stock of youth. Both the EFA Fast Track Initiative and EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005 encourage using primary completion rate as a combined indicator for both coverage and quality. Meanwhile, it appears “learning” seems to attract increasing interest of key international organizations such as UNESCO and World Bank (see UNESCO 2009 and World Bank 2011).

Education of good quality is one that achieves its objectives of equipping people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values as learning outcomes that individuals and the society require. This working definition is used in the subsequent discussion. However, non-cognitive elements of education objectives have been more difficult to measure by common tools. As long as perception on the roles and objectives of education vary between policy makers, industries, parents and students, a working definition of the quality of education is at best indicative and will have to be adjusted according to the context.

2. Current Status and Challenges

Each government collects data to monitor and assess some aspects of quality of the country’s education system, such as pupil-teacher ratio, pupil-textbook ratio, ratio of qualified teachers, expenditure per pupil, etc. Thanks to synthesized efforts of the respective countries and the international community to improve the quality of education, repetition rates both at primary and secondary levels are falling globally over the last decade (UNESCO Institute for Statistics). Primary completion rate is gradually improving especially in South Asia and Sub-Sahara Africa, where the completion rates were formerly

much lower than other regions'. Pupil-teacher ratio is also getting lower. Still, there are notable gaps of students' learning outcomes between developing and high-income countries.

Table 1 compares the average scores of 15 year-olds (in the case of PISA) and Grade 8 students (in the case of TIMSS) in three subject areas: literacy, mathematics and science. Students in high-income countries outperform those in developing countries of all regions except for East Asia and the Pacific in mathematics and science of 2007 TIMSS. This data supports the widely accepted view that the less favorable educational conditions in many developing countries impede learners to achieve as high cognitive skills as those in high-income countries.

Table 1: Comparison of Average Scores of Student Learning Assessments by Region

Regions	Literacy			Mathematics					Science			
	PISA2000	PISA2003	PISA2006	PISA2000	PISA2003	PISA2006	TIMSS2003	TIMSS2007	PISA2000	PISA2003	TIMSS2003	TIMSS2007
	15 years old			15 years old			Grade 8		15 years old		Grade 8	
High-Income Countries	511.7	501.4	489.0	511.1	489.0	497.4	511.5	486.7	506.2	504.5	520.2	487.7
East Asia & Pacific	462.1	461.3	475.4	476.0	475.4	475.7	509.5	496.2	480.1	475.0	498.7	490.4
East & Central Asia	440.6	465.4	439.8	448.9	439.8	458.6	490.8	477.7	454.7	483.5	498.2	490.8
Latin America & Carribean	390.0	411.5	402.8	350.8	402.8	394.1	387.0	360.0	381.6	411.1	413.0	402.0
Middle East & North Africa	451.5	374.4	406.5	436.0	406.5	397.1	409.0	397.6	436.0	384.6	430.1	434.5
South Asia	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sub-Sahara Africa							302.0	336.5			288.0	329.0
Overall average	478.0	478.6	458.9	476.4	458.9	467.6	466.7	447.1	478.4	486.0	474.1	462.7

Calculated from data provided by *EdStats*

However, when it comes to the exact causes of such disparities, existing data does not provide us with a clear picture. First of all, the relationship between various forms of inputs into education system and students' learning outcomes are not obvious. Numerous studies have indicated that there is no clear co-relation between the increase in public expenditure on education (as % of GDP) and better educational indicators. Some factors tend to demonstrate stronger effects on students' outcomes than others. These include: the time spent on studying the subject at school and on homework; availability of textbooks; and pupils' socio-economic status (summarized in EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005, pp.40-48). Still, the results presented by different studies are not consistent. Quality of education is also influenced by factors which are external to the basic education system. Nowadays, it is widely noted that Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) will prepare students better for basic education and has positive effects on students' learning outcomes (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007). Also, the availability of further schooling – secondary or higher – will affect students' and parents' commitment to education at the basic level.

When there is less prospect of further education or employment after basic education, people might be less motivated and either drop out or perform poorly. Such external factors which shape educational demands make it difficult to assess quality of education and its outcomes.

Also, the comparison of these outcomes has to be made with caution, because they are measuring different kinds of cognitive skills. TIMSS was designed to align broadly with the mathematics and science curricula, and its results suggest the degree to which students have learned mathematics and social concepts and skills likely to have been taught in school. On the other hand, PISA tries to assess the preparedness of students to apply their knowledge through reasoning and analyzing actual situations.

Moreover, test results of cognitive achievement are incomplete proxies for the quality of education. They do not tell anything about values, attitudes or other non-cognitive skills which are also important aims of education. These elements thus have to be considered to comprehensively understand the quality of education. As much as the performance in cognitive assessments, attention also has to be paid to the kind and relevance of knowledge students acquire (or fail to acquire) at school. In this regard, contribution of school education to poverty reduction, social development, survival and employment of learners has to be considered more explicitly and holistically.

Also, a large number of factors which affect the quality of education are unique to a specific school or learning contexts. International assessments of cognitive skills suggest that school quality differs widely among and within countries. In particular, children who live in developing countries not only receive fewer years of education but also reach lower achievement levels. The learning process is extremely complex. It first and foremost involves relationships between teachers and students following a given curriculum and teaching practices, but it also takes place in a broader social context. These relationships are further conditioned by the resources available to schools.

Based on such considerations, this conference calls for closer attention to the following aspects of education which determine the quality of education: teachers, teaching-learning process, relationship among schools, family and surrounding communities, and management.

3. Efforts and Challenges

Efforts Made

In an attempt to improve the quality of education, numerous programs are being implemented in many developing countries. In recent years, national assessments have been implemented in order to monitor and help improve education at the national level in increasingly more countries from the late 1990s through 2010. Table 2 below shows the

percentage of countries where national assessments have been undertaken at least once between the years of 1995-1999 and 2000-2006. The figures show a marked surge in every region worldwide during this period, with the increase particularly notable in the regions of East Asia, Oceania, Central Europe and Eastern Europe. Around two-thirds of Western European and North American countries were already undergoing the national assessments at the end of the 1990s, and continue to implement them in increasing numbers today.

Table 2. Percentage of countries in each region that carried out at least one national assessment between 1995-1999 and 2000-2006

	1995-1999	2000-2006	Figure of change
Developed countries	58%	81%	+23
Developing countries	28%	50%	+22
Transitional countries	0%	17%	+17
Sub-Saharan Africa	24%	33%	+9
Arab countries	15%	55%	+40
Central Asia	11%	33%	+22
East Asia/Oceania	15%	64%	+49
Southern/Western Asia	11%	44%	+33
Latin America/Caribbean	54%	59%	+5
North America/Western Europe	66%	77%	+11
Central/Eastern Europe	25%	65%	+40

Sources: UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008

While the quality of education depends upon numerous elements, one vital component is most certainly the students' learning outcome, as seen through factors such as academic achievement. Many factors affect this outcome whose connections may be seen in the figure below. Learner characteristics include aspects such as socioeconomic background, ECCE experience, and health and nutrition; whereas school inputs include teaching and learning materials, physical infrastructure and facilities, as well as human resources such as teachers and principals. These school inputs in turn influence the various elements that make up the school process, such as school management, teaching and learning, and relation with parents and community. Moreover, school management and relations with parents and community affect the teaching and learning that directly contribute to the outcomes. These series of impact relations are in turn framed by multiple contexts, including government commitment toward the quality of education, the system of national testing, existing priorities of the educational sector, capacity of governmental

education ministries, socio-cultural and religious factors, economic and labor market conditions, and more (Figure 1).

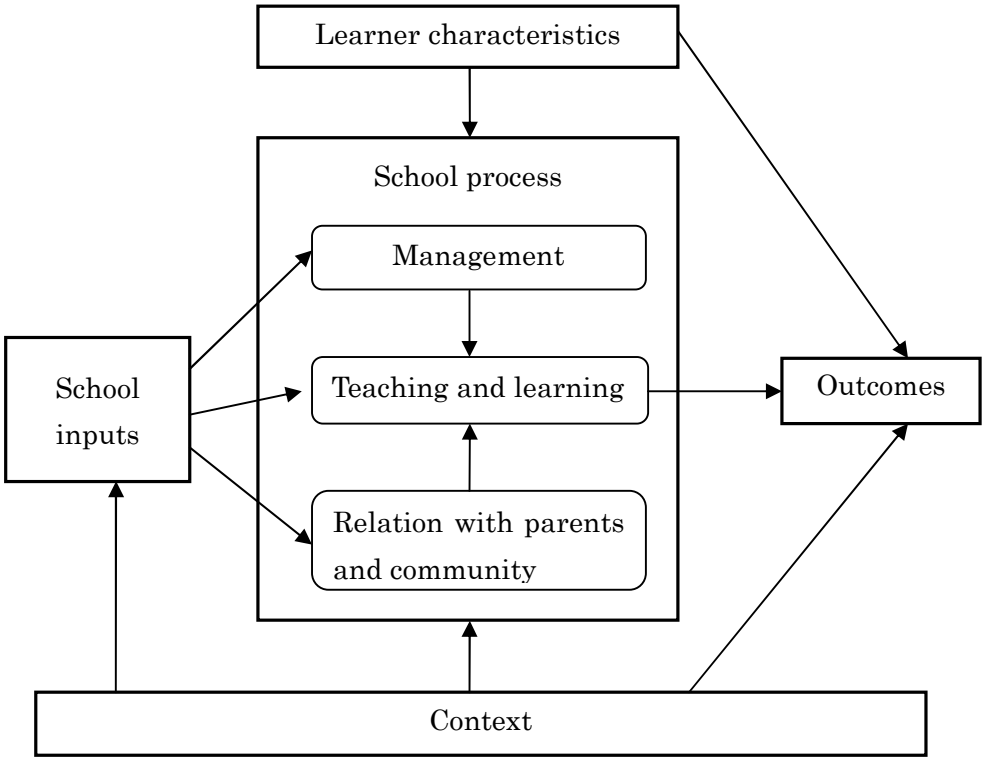

Figure 1. Factors affecting student learning outcomes

It is well-known that many studies were conducted in order to arrive at an understanding of these structural relations. One important method has been the education production function analysis, although its conclusions are not always consistent. For example, while some studies reveal that pupil-teacher ratios have a positive effect on academic achievement, other research has revealed a different conclusion. The same is true for teacher education. This is likely due to the extremely complex nature of the prescribed structure for academic achievement, as well as the fact that the factors contributing to academic achievement vary widely by context. In many developing countries, numerous programs have been implemented in order to improve school input — including teaching material development, facility maintenance, and teacher deployment, as well as to improve school process, such as establishing adequate learning time, reforming curricula, and improving pedagogy. Efforts have also been made to enhance learner characteristics by targeting pre-school age children through improvement of ECCE and child nutrition.

Japan's Education Cooperation in Relation to Quality Improvement

Japan's activities relating to education cooperation often focus upon teacher training targeting educational improvements in the area of science and mathematics. One particularly notable project has been an initiative to support the strengthening of science and mathematics education in Africa, known as SMASE-WECSA. This is because one of the reasons for Africa's low educational level in mathematics and science is due to low academic skills on the part of teachers. Partnering with the Ministry of Education in Kenya, JICA launched a ten-year project in 1998 known as SMASSE (Strengthening of Mathematics and Science in Secondary Education) aimed at training secondary-level science and mathematics teachers throughout Kenya. This initiative resulted in notable improvements in the process of teacher learning, which in turn increased students' interest in mathematics and science. Other African countries also expressed interest in this program, resulting in the birth of the network known as SMASE-WECSA.

Japan has also seen success in its cooperation efforts to support school management. Through the "School for All" project in Niger, for example, school management committees were established and other initiatives were put in place in order to improve the educational environment. As a result, some 10,000 elementary schools nationwide are now led by school management committees that are devising and implementing plans of action to improve schools. The learning environment is being improved by building schools as well as purchasing textbooks and other learning materials with funds and labor provided by the communities. In addition, increased awareness on the part of local citizens has also helped to improve the learning environment within the home. Other nearby countries such as Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso have also implemented similar programs aimed at improving their schools.

In 2010, the Japanese government announced "Japan's Education Cooperation Policy 2011-2015", and put forward a model called "School for All" aimed at comprehensive improvement of the learning environment. Specifically, schools, communities and educational administration are encouraged to work together in order to improve schools, thereby prioritizing (1) quality education, (2) a safe learning environment, (3) school-based administration, (4) openness to the community, and (5) inclusive education. Here, support was tailored to each individual country's specific needs.

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Resource Paper on Improving Equity in Education

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1. Introduction: Why equity matters

Various stakeholders in the international community have been putting their collective effort into promoting basic education in developing countries in order to realize international goals such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA). It is significant that the number of people who have access to education has increased during the last decade. For instance, the average net enrollment ratios of primary education in developing countries have continued to increase since the adoption of MDGs and EFA in 2000: from 58% to 76% between 1999 and 2008 in Sub-Saharan Africa, and from 75% to 86% in South and West Asia.

However, there still remains the issue of equity. Among the 67 million out-of-school children, 53% are girls (UNESCO, 2011). Children of lower socioeconomic status, those from rural and remote areas, or those who are ethnic minorities or belong to other disadvantaged groups face serious obstacles in gaining access to good quality education. These problems are often considered as a matter of inequality, but they should also be recognized as a matter of equity. The issue of equality concerns equal access to schooling, equality within schooling, and equality through schooling for *all*, while that of equity pays special attention to forms of exclusion among different groups and concerns the *kind* of education that could achieve the desired outcomes in relation to *social justice*.

We must be more sensitive in examining the subject of equity, recognizing, in particular, the different types of inequity that exist in the field of education. In terms of formal schooling, out-of-school children have always been one of the most serious concerns, and international assistance to developing countries has often concentrated on reducing the number of out-of-school children. However, we should also be conscious about the disparities among those children who are attending school. There are a significant number of students who have been unable to receive good quality of education due to the disadvantages they face in terms of their gender, socioeconomic status, health conditions, etc. It is problematic that the quality of teaching and learning has not been ensured in many schools in developing countries for various reasons, including a lack of qualified teachers, poor quality of teaching

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materials and school facilities, teacher absenteeism due to low salaries, and very high teacher-pupil ratios due to a massive expansion of the student population after the free primary education policy was introduced. Various stakeholders in the international community have contributed tremendous effort into realizing the goal of “Schooling for All”, but it is time to reset the goal to that of “Learning for All” in order to ensure that better quality teaching and learning take place in developing countries.

It is important to understand that the disadvantages which prevent children from receiving good education are often multilayered, and that disparities in education cannot be resolved simply by removing a single problem. For instance, the populations with the least access to education may have multiple features of the following characteristics, i.e. they may be female, poor, living in a rural area, an ethnic minority, and/or disabled. Moreover, UNICEF (2006) has pointed out that the following problems may prevent children from having equitable access to education: armed conflict, the need to work, violence and harassment in schools, a tradition of child marriage, a lack of parental care, sexual violence, exploitation and abuse, and the need to perform domestic work, particularly for girls.In addition, there is the issue of the “hidden curriculum”, which is unrecognized and often unintended knowledge, values, and beliefs that are transmitted through schooling or other educational activities in a non-school setting. These messages reinforce a negative perception towards the inequity existing in society, such as a gender bias and a stereotypical image of disabilities.

To promote equitable access to education, the governments of developing countries have introduced various incentive policies to encourage children from disadvantaged groups to attend school; for example, scholarship programs, a quota system that gives priority to disadvantaged children and the “Food for Education” program - a type of ration for students from poor families. Some of these efforts have contributed significantly to improving vulnerable populations’ access to education. However, in many developing countries, it is often difficult, and sometimes highly political, to identify who belongs to the disadvantaged groups.

We must be aware that it is not an easy task for many developing countries to collect adequate data that will clarify the issue of equity in education. Countries normally collect educational data through a school census. However, this method is not always sufficiently linked with other data collection schemes such as a population census and various types of household surveys. Due to the lack of linkages among different surveys, it is sometimes extremely difficult to monitor and assess who is not in school and why.

While the socio-economic and cultural context of each country or society influences the equity issues to a great extent, the next section presents the status and challenges in three areas, namely, free primary education policy, educational policy for gender equity, and

children with special needs and inclusive education. These areas have increasingly attracted more attention in the international community in recent years and present major challenges for achieving the education-related MDGs.

2. Status and Challenges

Free Primary Education Policy

After the Jomtien conference on EFA in 1990 and especially the Dakar World Education Forum in 2000, it has been increasingly understood that making primary education free would include children from poor families and thereby primary education becomes universal. Free Primary Education (FPE) policy generally means the abolition of school fees and the provision of textbooks, furniture and other scholastic materials by the government. Parents will provide for uniforms, exercise books and lunch for pupils. As of 2008, among 54 low-income countries, 15 countries have already introduced the fee abolition policy and 10 countries are either in the planning stage or have shown interest in adopting fee abolition. The most apparent impact of the FPE policy is seen in increased enrolment in many countries. For instance, in the year following abolition, enrolment increased by 12% in Mozambique, 18% in Kenya, and 23% in Tanzania, and 51% in Malawi (UNESCO 2007; The World Bank and UNICEF 2009). The FPE policy signifies strong government commitment and donor contribution towards EFA/MDGs goals, and is greatly appreciated by parents and communities for its intention to benefit the poor.

However, experiences show that the implementation of such bold policy, in reality, presents much complexity. In many cases, fee abolition has been abruptly implemented with both national and international push in a hasty manner, leading to various problems on the ground. When school fees were abolished, over-age and underage children flocked into school. The most notable challenge was overcrowded classrooms, which in some schools led to low teacher motivation. The leverage between strong commitment of governments and donors and available resources was another issue. In reality, schools are compelled to hold larger classes with more limited resources. In many cases, schools ask parents for non-tuition fees, which discourage poor children from going to school.

In some countries, parents have also become passive in every form of participation in school activities and decision-making under the FPE policy (Nishimura and Ogawa, Ed. 2008). A common attitude illustrated by parents and communities is that now that the government is responsible for *everything*, they have no stake in school governance. Under such an environment, weak relation between schools and parents/communities and dropout of pupils are another challenge under the FPE policy.

Existing literatures suggest that although fee abolition has made a strong impact on

increasing enrolment of the disadvantaged such as poor girls, it is not yet clear whether this impact will ensure universal completion of primary education. For instance, in Uganda, only 22% of children that enrolled in primary one in 1997, with the introduction of the free primary education policy, managed to reach the final grade seven in 2003 (Byamugisha, 2006). It was also found that poor girls benefited most from fee abolition but that its impact still remained at lower grades (Nishimura, Yamano, and Sasaoka, 2008). There are numerous disparities in educational access and quality according to family income, geographical location and gender, for which fee abolition alone would not find a simple solution (World Bank and UNICEF 2009). Neither does new financial flow of education budget based on a flat per capita rate cater for pupils with various needs (e.g. children in the disadvantaged areas, disabled children, orphan and vulnerable children etc.).

Educational Policy for Gender Equity

Gender parity shows equal participation for girls and boys in education based on their respective proportions of the relevant age-groups in the population. The statistics show that both gender parity index for school enrollment and literacy have generally improved over the past decades as shown in Figures 1 and2. The number of countries that achieved gender parity in primary school enrollment has increased between 1970 and 2008 in all regions, albeit at different pace (see Figure 2). While there has also been an upward trend over time at secondary level in most regions except for sub-Saharan Africa, the progress is not as distinctive as that at the primary level. Even at primary level, when considering the educational process such as intake, dropout and survival, there is a complex trend in gender parity among countries. In many countries, while boys are more likely than girls to enter school, it is also the boys who are more likely than girls to drop out of school. In some countries, girls are more disadvantaged in intake, dropout and survival, while in others, the trend reverses.

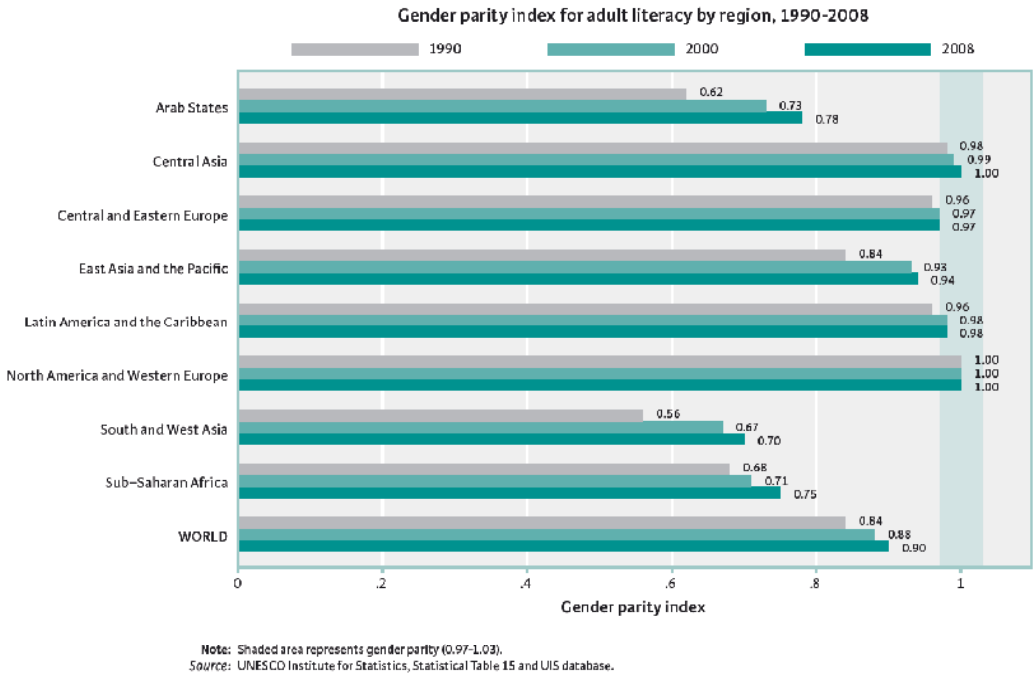

Figure 1. Gender parity index for adult literacy by region, 1990-2008

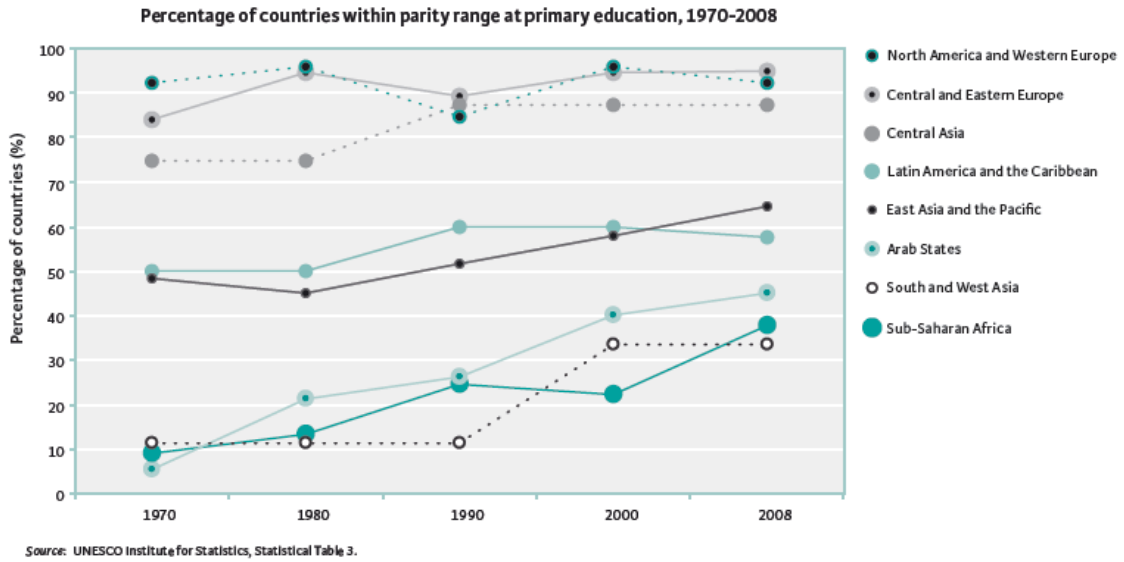

Figure 2. Percentage of countries within each region that have attained gender parity in primary schooling participation at five points in time between 1970 and 2008.

Nevertheless, gender alone is not sufficient to grasp the situation of inequity. The life of a child is often affected by compounded effects such as gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, geographical location and conflict. For instance, poor girls and girls in rural areas are less likely than boys to attend school, while in urban areas and in the richest household quintile, gender parity is almost equal to one (see Figure3). In every region of the world, ethnic minorities and indigenous groups often have less access to formal education than other groups (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2010). Furthermore, more than 40% of out-of-school children live in conflict-affected countries that also have the largest gender inequalities and lowest literacy levels in the world (UNGEI, 2011). War affects boys and girls in different ways and in this respect context needs to be taken into consideration.

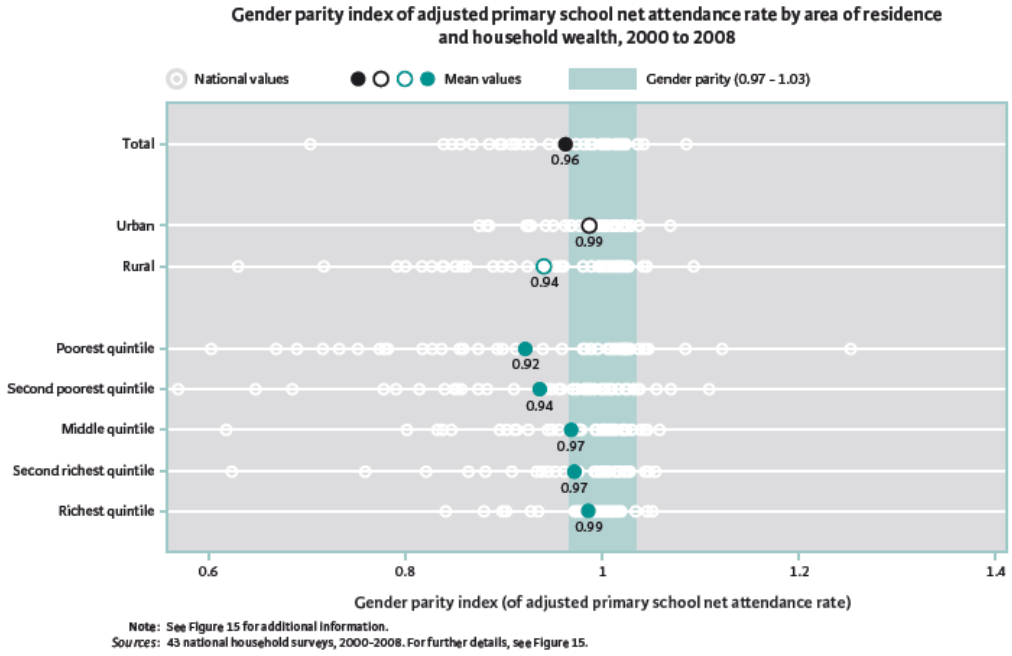

Figure3. Gender parity in primary school attendance by area of residence and household wealth

Although gender parity is useful for understanding *access* to school between girls and boys, gender parity is only a first step towards gender *equality*. Gender equality is understood more broadly as the right to access and participate in education, as well as to receive meaningful education benefits with social and economic life. Thus, critical consideration needs to be given to gender sensitive educational environments, processes and achievements at all levels in education. Assessments conducted in developing countries reveal dismal outcomes that fall far short of the desired mastery of the intended reading or mathematics curriculum for both girls and boys, while there seems to be more

significant gender gaps in terms of both reading (favoring girls) and mathematics (favoring boys) in countries in Southern and Eastern Africa (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2010). There is also a consistent trend in all regions that women face more barriers to employment and lower pay than men do. While social norms on gender roles and gender discrimination often influence the labor market, education in terms of not only *how long* one learnt but also *how much* one learnt, is a key determinant of wages in many developing countries.

Educational policies for gender equity in the past can be summarized as *targeted interventions*, *systemic changes*, and *creating enabling environments* (UNESCO, 2005a). Targeted interventions include scholarships, admission quotas, or subsidies for the indirect costs of schooling, as well as single-sex schools and various special measures to provide encouragement to targeted groups. However, targeted interventions can: (a) be prone to leakage or corruption; (b) be administratively costly to manage; and (c) be politically unpopular (UNESCO, 2005a). Systemic changes aim at universal access and quality improvement, and include provision of infrastructure, revision of curricula and textbooks, improvement of teachers' skills in gender-aware teaching and learning methods. Systemic changes may also involve management reforms such as decentralization and improvement of monitoring and evaluation systems. Creating enabling environments generally incorporates raising gender awareness, sensitization, and mobilization within communities. All of these suggest that interventions should be cross-cutting through learners, the education systems, families, communities, and the wider environment, as well as be multi-sectoral to tackle a range of constraints on both the supply and demand sides.

Japan has also attempted to address such multi challenges faced by disadvantaged girls in counties in need, utilizing various modalities of cooperation with other development partners. For example, to improve access to basic education of adequate quality for girls in Yemen, Japan has supported grant projects for school construction, together with a technical cooperation project to develop a community participatory school management model, called as "BRIDGE model," which explicitly addresses the challenge of eliminating gender disparity. Recognizing the significance of cultural barriers to and constraints on gender equality, the BRIDGE model brought parents, tribe leaders and community religious leaders in school improvement and awareness activities. Over the three years of the project phase 1, the ratio of female students to male students increased by more than 10 percentage points in pilot schools.

Children with Special Needs and Inclusive Education

In addition to the "Free Primary Education Policy" and "Educational Policy for Gender Equality", which being directly related to Goals 2 and 3 of MDGs, the international community started in recent years to look at the large potentials and impacts of introducing

the concept of “Inclusive Education” into EFA policies in developing countries to improve equity in education. Recognizing the variety of disadvantages that out-of-school children tend to have, not only being a girl or being financially challenged, educational policy makers growingly realized the importance of introducing more comprehensive approaches to address the various special needs of the disadvantaged population, including physical and mental disability, in their policy processes and school practices.

According to UNESCO (2009), it is estimated that about one third of the out-of school children have disabilities. Moreover, some studies even suggest that only 1-5% of children with disabilities are enrolled in schools (Habibi, 1999; Kokkala & Savolainen, 2000; World Bank, 2003). As clearly indicated in these figures, EFA or Education MDGs would never be achieved without educational provision for the children with special needs and disabilities.

Although there have been many international commitments and attempts made to address this serious issue and to promote education for children with special needs and disabilities, including “the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989)” and “Jomtien Declaration (1990)”, the most notable one was probably the World Conference on Special Needs Education that was held in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994 and which adopted the “Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education and a Framework for Action”. The Salamanca Statement has laid the fundamental basis of the notion of inclusion or inclusive education, a new approach to promote educational opportunities for children with special needs and disabilities. Furthermore, the Salamanca Statement stated “regular schools with inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discrimination, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.” This implies the importance of inclusive education from the point of view of effectiveness (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996), positively regarding the diversity within a classroom, a school or an educational system as a quality of education, not only for those with special needs but also for those without. The Salamanca Statement and the subsequent empirical studies and discussions among experts and policy makers also indicated higher cost-effectiveness of inclusive education compared to a segregated education system (UNESCO, 2003).

How then can we understand and promote this concept of inclusion in educational policies for EFA? UNESCO defines inclusion as “an approach that looks into how to transform education systems and other learning environments in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It aims towards enabling teachers and learners both to feel comfortable with diversity and to see it as a challenge and enrichment of the learning environment, rather than a problem” (UNESCO, 2005b p.15). Word Bank (2003 p.2) also states “Inclusive Education means that schools and teachers accommodate and respond to individual learners; this inclusiveness itself benefits the school, the teachers, and all students.” Thus,

inclusive education is regarded and understood by these organizations not as a minor adjustment to meet the needs of children with disabilities, but as a more comprehensive education reform to benefit all the stakeholders, welcoming diversity and upgrading the quality of education for all.

These ideas of inclusion can be seen as the “idealistic” approach for all schools and classes, in accommodating all children with diversity for improving respective quality of education. However, the current situation of special needs education in many developing countries is far from the ideal situation. The “reality” is severe and presents many challenges. Most children with special needs and disabilities are still out of school. Even if they are enrolled in schools, they are likely to be in segregated classes or special schools. If they are fortunately enrolled in integrated classrooms, their educational environments are often far from “welcoming diversity” because of various problems, such as insufficient teacher training on special needs education, large class size, discrimination towards the disadvantaged populations, and heavy reliance to assess quality of education on the scores of standardized tests that tend to be high with homogeneous settings rather than classes with diversity. All these typical educational problems worldwide, not only in developing countries, prevent inclusive education from being practiced.

UNESCO (2005a) notes that the key challenge lies in moving from specialized targeted interventions, mostly for girls and children with special needs, to mainstream interventions that create new forms of working that are gender-sensitive and more broadly responsive to the various special needs and social contexts in which policies are implemented. While there are many successful small- or medium-scale projects in various regions, how to scale them up by developing institutional and systemic capacity remains a challenge.

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