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Clarke, Matthew and Feeny, Simon 2007, Education, poverty and the millennium development goals*, in Education for the end of poverty : implementing all the millennium development goals*, Nova Science Publishers, New York, NY., pp.3-8.

Available from Deakin Research Online:

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30006995

Chapter 1

EDUCATION, POVERTY AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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INTRODUCTION

Over one billion of the world's population live in poverty, existing on less than US$1 a day. More than 2 billion live on less than US$2 a day (UNDP, 2006). Poverty though is greater than simply a lack of monetary income. Poverty is also characterised by premature death, preventable illnesses, a lack of access to clean water and sanitation, insecurity, and illiteracy. Those who are interested in development and interested in improving the lives of the poor, must therefore be primarily interested in ending this broad view of poverty. The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) were adopted unanimously by the United Nations in 2000 to directly combat the multidimensional aspects of poverty. While the international community has previously recognised the need to address poverty – for example, 1997-2006 was the United Nation's first *Decade for the Eradication of Poverty* – the adoption of the MDGs was the first time that it had set itself explicit targets in terms of achieving progress in the developing world within a specified timeframe. Goals were set to eradicate extreme monetary poverty and hunger, promote gender equality, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS and malaria, ensure environmental sustainability and develop global partnerships for development. Targets were also set for education. Indeed, the second MDG is to achieve universal primary education, thus ensuring that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary education.

Consideration of education however, should not be limited to this single Goal which focuses on achieving primary education since education is fundamental to the achievement of all the MDGs and central to eradicating poverty. Education is life-long and occurs both formally and informally. Universal education that provides the basis upon which future life-long learning rests, must be accompanied by education for sustainable development so that communities become capable of identifying their own problems and directing progress and development themselves. While education provides private benefits through enhanced employment opportunities and the ability to participate more fully in society, it also provides

very important social benefits. Education can become a shared experienced in the context of a learning community resulting in significant public benefits. Societies with educated populations are also better placed to engage more directly with the global economy. Thus the means of communities moving forward in their development and sustainability processes is supported when the notion of community wide learning is occurring. Thus, the focus of education within development and the MDGs should not be limited to the achievement of primary education, but enlarged to incorporate life-long education broadly defined.

This volume will therefore consider education more widely than that of simply the achievement of universal primary education. However, it is valuable to begin by reviewing progress made towards this Goal, because it is precisely universal primary education that allows and facilitates life-long and community-wide learning. Universal primary education is the basis upon which all other education rests. Other relevant education statistics which are available for developing countries are also discussed below.

Table 1 provides primary school enrolment ratios by region for the years 1991, 1999 and 2004. The table demonstrates that developing countries have made some important progress towards achieving universal primary education by 2015. On average, the net primary school enrolment ratio has increased from 79 in 1991 to 86 in 2004. Based on this trend, while universal primary education will not be achieved globally, a fairly small percentage of children will miss out. However, regional differences exist across the world. While Latin America and the Caribbean have an enrolment ratio of 95 per cent, Sub-Saharan Africa is lagging far behind with an enrolment ratio of just 64 per cent in 2004 with some countries having less that half of their children enrolled in primary school (UN, 2006). AIDS has had a very large impact on education in this region. The lives of many teachers have been lost and children have been forced to leave school. Oceania and Western Asia also have relatively low enrolment ratios in primary education, with ratios of 80 and 82 per cent respectively.

Table 1. Net Enrolment Ratio in Primary Education

	1991	1999	2004
Developing Regions	78.8	81.8	85.8
Northern Africa	80.6	88.3	94.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	53.0	55.7	64.2
Latin America and the Caribbean	85.8	93.4	94.9
Eastern Asia	97.7	98.9	94.1
Southern Asia	72.2	78.2	89.3
South-eastern Asia	92.3	90.3	92.9
Western Asia	79.7	81.6	82.9
Oceania	74.4	80.8	79.6
Developed Regions	96.4	96.7	95.6

Notes: Table is adapted from UN (2006). Data relate to the primary-level enrolees per 100 children of enrolment age. Ratios correspond to school years ending in the years displayed.

Equal access to education is crucial for development. The third MDG is to promote gender equality and empower women. Further, one of the MDG targets within this Goal is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and at all levels of education no later than 2015. Table 2 provides the ratio of girls to boys in primary education. A ratio of one per cent would imply that the same number of girls attend primary school than boys. In developing regions overall, the ratio at primary level has increased from

0.87 in 1991 to 0.94 in 2004. Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia have ratios of one, or close to one. The largest gender gaps in primary education are in Sub-Saharan Africa and Western Asia. The same applies to the ratio of girls to boys at the secondary level of education.

Table 2. Ratio of Girls to Boys in Primary Education

	1991	1999	2004
Developing Regions	0.87	0.91	0.94
Northern Africa	0.82	0.90	0.94
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.84	0.86	0.89
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.97	0.97	0.97
Eastern Asia	0.93	1.01	1.00
Southern Asia	0.76	0.82	0.91
South-Eastern Asia	0.96	0.96	0.97
Western Asia	0.83	0.87	0.89
Oceania	0.92	0.95	0.91
Developed Regions	0.99	1.00	0.99

Notes: Table is adapted from UN (2006). Data relate to gross enrolment ratios.

Not only is it important to get children enrolled in school but it is also important that they fulfil their full term of primary education in order to yield all of the benefits that an education has to offer. Table 3 provides data on primary school completion rates for the years 1999 and 2004. It shows that for all developing regions primary school completion rates have increased from 80 to 84 per cent. Completion rates are very high for Latin American and the Caribbean, Eastern Asia, and South-Eastern Asia. Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the lowest completion rates. In 2004 completion rates for this region were just 56 per cent although this represents an increase from 51 per cent in 1999. However, Oceania is another region with low and stagnant primary school completion rates. There is a large gender gap in primary school completion rates in Sub-Saharan Africa, Southern Asia and Western Asia.

Table 3. Primary Completion Rate

	1999			2004		
	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
Developing Regions	80	84	77	84	87	82
Northern Africa	90	98	83	91	93	90
Sub-Saharan Africa	51	55	46	56	61	52
Latin America and the Caribbean	96	96	97	98	98	99
Eastern Asia	102	102	102	98	98	98
Southern Asia	71	78	63	82	87	78
South-eastern Asia	88	89	87	95	95	95
Western Asia	79	85	73	82	88	76
Oceania	64	65	63	64	68	61
Developed Regions	99	98	99	99	99	98

Notes: Table is adapted from UN (2006). The primary completion rate is calculated as the total number of new entrants in the last grade of primary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population of the theoretical entrance age to the last grade. Rates correspond to school years ending in the years displayed.

Other gaps in the access to education exist throughout the world. For example, enrolment rates are often higher in urban areas relative to rural areas. Enrolments rates also differ for people form different social backgrounds, religion and ethnicity. These are important issues for policy makers to consider in striving to achieve universal primary education by 2015.

Assessing countries literacy rates is another useful way to examine the effectiveness of their education systems. Table 4 below provides the literacy rate of 15 to 24 year olds by region for the years 1990 to 2000/04. It is encouraging to see that literacy rates have increased for nearly all regions in the developing world. Northern Africa, Western Asia, and Southern Asia have experienced the largest gains in youth literacy. However, the falling literacy rate for Oceania during the period is an issue of grave concern and is likely to represent a decline in the quality of education in this region. Once again large gender gaps exist with literacy rates being much lower in Southern Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Northern Africa for women than they are for men.

Table 4. Literacy Rates of 15-24 year olds (%)

	1990	2000/04
Developing Regions	81	85
Northern Africa	66	84
Sub-Saharan Africa	67	73
Latin America and the Caribbean	93	96
Eastern Asia	96	99
Southern Asia	62	72
South-eastern Asia	94	96
Western Asia	80	91
Oceania	74	73
Developed Regions	100	99

Notes: Table is adapted from UN (2006). Data relate to the latest literacy estimates and projections released by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) for the reference period 2000/04.

The MDG targets and indicators are often criticised for being quantitative rather than qualitative. It is certainly true that the statistics and tables provided above don't directly capture the quality of education that children around the world receive. Policy makers interested in improving society through education also must consider factors such as the relevance of school curriculums, how qualified and trained teachers are delivering the education, and whether children have proper access to classrooms, textbooks and other important resources. Some of these issues are discussed in greater detail in various chapters throughout this volume.

Achieving the very ambitious goal of universal primary education will take time – and should not come at the expense of quality in education. Achieving the goal requires additional resources to the education sector for building schools, providing school materials, training teachers and subsidising/abolishing fees. But additional resources in other sectors will also be required. Roads and other infrastructure are required to improve access to schools, improved levels of health will help improve child attendance and it is also important to ensure that relevant employment opportunities exist for school graduates. Improving governance will ensure that these resources are allocated to the right areas in a timely reliable manner.

VOLUME CONTENTS

It is clear that while the MDG of achieving universal primary education is both a desirable and important outcome, there are a host of other issues that policy makers need to consider in education sectors. These issues are the subject of this book. The authors of the following chapters include a mix of development practitioners as well as academics engaged in research in this field. Section two of this book provides a discussion between the links of education and development and sets out why education is linked to achievement of all the MDGs.

In chapter two, Fien and Hughes argue that the role of education is becoming increasingly important due to nations being inextricable linked through a globalised economy and a common environment that is struggling to survive. The authors identify three areas of priority: Education for All (EFA); Technical, Vocational Education and Training; and Education for Sustainable Development. The chapter outlines the need for nations and agencies to work together in order for progress in these areas to be achieved.

In chapter three, Rae examines global education, the values debate and ending poverty. This chapter explores how global education requires both a cross-curriculum perspective in schooling and a distinctive ethical and methodological approach to student learning. In the context of current Australian school education, it has a critical contribution to make in the sphere of values education. The chapter explores how global education has enormous potential in providing a framework for a holistic approach to values education.

In chapter four, Guevara examines formal education practice within the broader contexts of non-formal education for lifelong learning. The chapter argues that instead of viewing formal and non-formal education as two distinct categories of education provision, we need to view the formal educational institutions as being embedded within the broader contexts that non-formal education arises from. This change in perspective will allow us to make the best use of the opportunities that are available to us within the formal education system to be responsive to the changing demands of our communities. This is illustrated with references to the Philippines.

Chapter five is concerned with social exclusion and quality in education. In this chapter, Furniss explores the relationships between theories of social exclusion and human capability and how these concepts affect quality education and equity. The chapter discusses the variety of reasons why learners might be excluded from education. It also demonstrates that achieving equitable education is very difficult when there is a great diversity of students. The chapter provides a number of recommendations for policy makers on how to improve both access to education and its quality and relevance for students, including that education must be relevant, barriers to student participation should be reduced, and systems need to be sensitive to a range of differences including race, ethnicity, culture and religion.

A number of case studies are provided in the third section of the book to illustrate the link between education and the end of poverty in selected countries.

In chapter six, Carroll and Kupczyk-Romanczuk focus on the experience of education in Timor Leste. For Timor Leste, the MDG of universal primary education by 2015 has received considerable attention. There has, however, been comparatively less focus on the promotion of secondary education and the specific educational needs of youth and adults. The chapter

outlines the challenge of achieving universal primary education in the recently independent country and discusses the dangers of neglecting other important levels of education.

In chapter seven, Shuaib examines the education needs of urban informal sector workers in Colombo, Sri Lanka. This sector has some very specific education needs. These workers are important, often accounting for 50 per cent of the urban workforce in developing countries. This chapter identifies the providers of education to this sector, the kind of education programs which are currently offered, and how these programs are offered. The chapter demonstrates that formal programs of education are inadequate for the sector, and programs need to consider the location of programs, their cost, and the period and time of their delivery. The chapter suggests that NGOs and government should play a joint role in providing education to urban informal workers.

Chapter eight by Ramsay, describes a program designed to improve the education outcomes of disadvantaged communities in Bangladesh. The project is administered by Plan Bangladesh in collaboration with other partners. Although primary school enrolments are very high in Bangladesh, drop out rates are also high and the quality of education is poor. The project addresses the role of teachers, education authorities, communities and parents and families in improving outcomes. The chapter examines the considerable success of the project at improving education outcomes and discusses future challenges to ensure the sustainability of these outcomes.

The final chapter by Kingham, examines an aid program which is designed to improve the quality of basic education in Islamic schools for disadvantaged children in Indonesia. The Learning Assistance Program for Islamic Schools (LAPIS) is an education program funded by the Australian Agency for International Development. The chapter reviews the objectives of the project and summarises the activities which have been undertaken. Significant achievements and the lessons learned from the program are identified.

CONCLUSION

While achieving universal primary education can be seen as a valuable end in itself, it is also a powerful tool in achieving all the MDGs and the end of poverty. This volume provides an overview of the role of education in development, but also illustrates the role with various case studies (based on the work of non-government organisations and other donors) in the Asia-Pacific region. If the MDGs are to be achieved and if poverty is to be eradicated, education must surely play a central role.

REFERENCES

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