

EU-AFRICA MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL (MDG) PARTNERSHIP

PRIORITY ACTION PLAN 4: EDUCATION

CURRENT STATE OF EDUCATION IN AFRICA

1. INTRODUCTION

Africa is not on course to achieve MDG 2 (universal primary completion) or MDG3 (gender equality). There have been significant increases in initial intake and enrolment rates that are remarkable given the low national incomes, high population growth rates, and high levels of conflict and illness, especially HIV/AIDS. However, the impact of these achievements has been reduced by a continuing high rate of pupils dropping out of primary education compounded by a low quality of provision. There are also very large disparities linked to disability, location and income. To quote the 2009 Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (GMR) that focuses on the problem of inequality, “too many children are receiving an education of such poor quality that they leave school without basic literacy and numeracy skills”. The GMR highlights the crucial role of improved governance for tackling the problem.

The EU-Africa MDG Education Action Plan (EAP) has several measures to improve equity and drop-out, including: elimination of school fees; initiatives for the completion rate of girls at all levels; school feeding and other social protection programmes for vulnerable families; special programmes for orphans and other vulnerable children; information exchange in relation to access for children with disabilities. Emphasis on these often neglected areas of social protection, vulnerable children and the disabled in the context of education reform is a distinguishing feature of this initiative. And gender equity (MDG3), particularly at junior secondary level, is vital for such externalities as family health and reducing population growth. There are also measures to tackle some of the key factors affecting the quality of education as enrolments expand, namely: the deployment, training and retention of teachers; enhancing education infrastructure; improving teaching and learning materials. This is in line with the EU Agenda for Action which seeks a teacher increase of 6 million globally by 2010 with EU support alongside 25 million more children in school. The EAP will also encourage the integration of life skills for HIV/AIDS and health education into the curriculum, thereby supporting MDG 6.

The EAP is intended to strengthen and build on existing regional initiatives. It offers key initial operational support to the African Union (AU) Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education in Africa (SDEA), and capacity-building for the Pan-African Institute for Education for Development (IPED). Channels for support to the EAP include the EFA Fast Track Initiative (FTI) and EFA High Level Group (HLG), the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), as well as the European Development Fund (EDF) and related programmes operating through the European Commission (EC) plus European Union Member State (EU MS) bilateral programmes and civil society programmes.

This paper starts by examining the context of the EAP: the state of education in Africa using indicators on which the EAP is expected to make an eventual, positive impact, and EAP's relation to the overarching initiatives highlighted above. This leads in to an examination of progress on the individual activities, identifying areas which should perhaps receive greater attention. The paper ends with conclusions and recommendations arising from this analysis.

2. STATISTICAL OVERVIEW

General Comments

Education data is available from the Unesco Institute for Statistics (UIS) Data Centre and reports, EFA GMRs, UN MDG Monitoring Reports and World Bank (WB) MDG reports, but with many gaps, uncertainties and paucity of data more recent than 2006. SDEA seeks to improve EMIS in Africa “to reverse the current phenomenon of data blank”.

Data tables and reports separate Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) from North Africa, but with different UN and World Bank definitions. This paper focuses on UNESCO-defined SSA, though most findings, notably low quality and equity, also apply to North Africa.

One over-riding SSA statistic is the population growth rate averaging 2.4%. Education systems have to expand at this rate just to maintain present enrolment ratios. But greater female access to secondary education helps to reduce population growth.

Free access to primary and secondary schooling (EAP outcomes 1 and 2 and activity 2)

The 2009 GMR reports legal guarantees of free primary education in 18 SSA states. But in 14 of these, some fees are still charged. 6 additional states do not charge fees.

The SSA regional gross intake rate (GIR) to primary year 1 increased from 90% in 1999 to 111% in 2006. However, the 2006 primary net enrolment ratio (NER) was still only 70%: the high GIR is more a result of over-age intake (and under-age intake leading to later high repetition) than universal access for the age group.

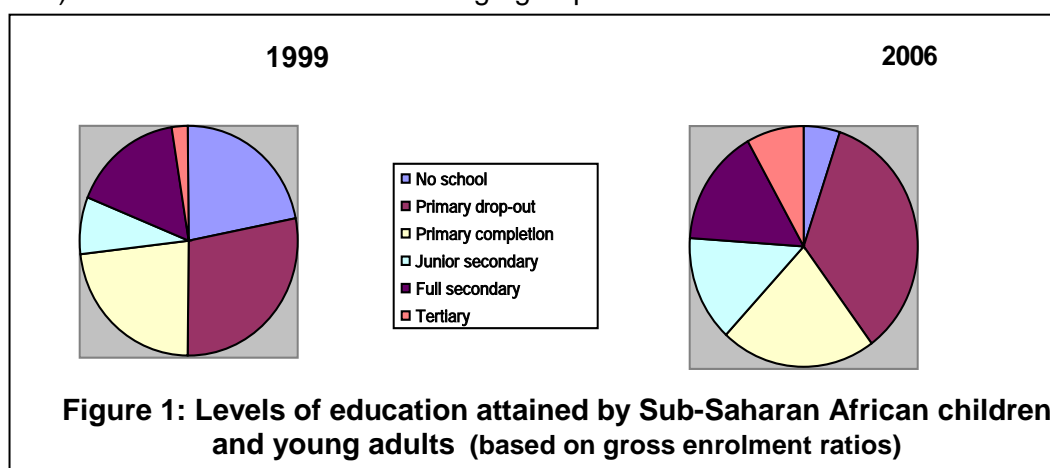


Figure 1: Levels of education attained by Sub-Saharan African children and young adults (based on gross enrolment ratios)

Higher enrolment and completion rates (EAP outcomes 2 and 3)

Figure 1 above illustrates progress between 1999 and 2006.

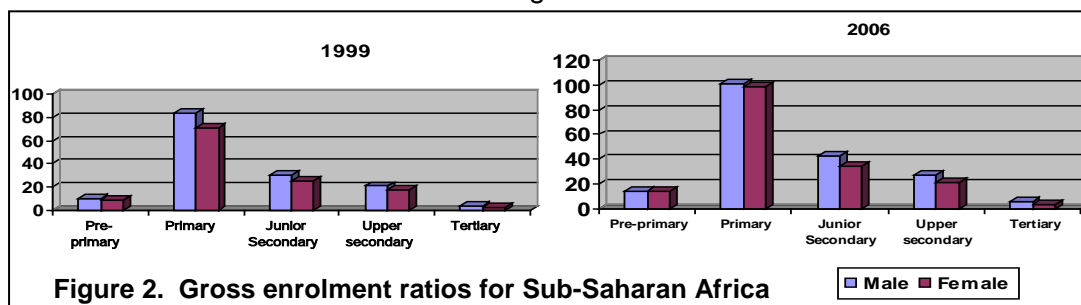
The increase in primary gross enrolment ratio (GER) from 78% to 95% is remarkable, corresponding to an NER increase from 56% to 70%. But whilst many countries have made huge gains, others have made little progress or even decreased their enrolments.

30% of pupils enrolling in year 1 fail to complete primary education. This is largely due to high costs including fees, and to the low quality of education (see below). Combining drop-outs and those who had no access, one almost third of the school age population, some 35 million children, were not in school in 2006. Thus although Africa is close to universal primary access, it is off course for the primary completion MDG 2.

38% of those completing primary education do not proceed to secondary education, though there has been a significant increase in the junior secondary and tertiary enrolment ratios. Pre-primary enrolments (EFA goal 1) are far below global levels.

Gender Equity (EAP outcomes 2 and 3)

Figure 2 below shows that gender equity has improved significantly at primary level but remains poor at junior secondary level. This is the key level for many of the positive externalities of girls' education, notably improved family planning (later marriage) and family health. But those girls who complete junior secondary education are less likely than boys to drop out from higher levels of education. Some states still have major inequity at primary level and overall Africa is not on course to meet the gender MDG3.



Quality (EAP outcomes 1 and 4)

SACMEQ II¹ found that in 6 countries, fewer than 10% of grade 6 children could read adequately. Only 22% of grade 4 South African students in a PIRLS² assessment reached the lowest level of reading ability compared with 95% in Europe. 29% of 15-24 year olds in SSA are illiterate. Despite this being an 11% decrease since 1985-94, the number of illiterate young people increased by 7 million (59% female) because of population growth and GMR 2009 predicts little chance of a significant decrease by 2015.

Quality education is prevented by excessive pupil teacher ratios (PTRs) and under-trained and poorly motivated teachers. The average primary PTR increased from 41:1 to 45:1 from 1999 to 2006 despite a 29% increase in teacher supply (42% for secondary teachers). On average 15% of teachers are untrained, rising to over 60% in some countries and rural areas (improving in some countries but worsening in others). Teacher attrition is significant (4% in one study), as is absenteeism (27%), exacerbated by HIV/AIDS (13% prevalence for teachers in South Africa). Infrastructure and educational materials continue to be a problem. SACMEQ II found that half the grade 6 students did not have a single book.

EQUITY (EAP outcomes 1, 2 and 3)

Education in SSA is highly inequitable. There are schools with teaching and facilities on a par with Europe, and, at the other extreme, classes taught under a tree, without books, by an unsupported and poorly educated amateur. A World Bank study³ found instances of participation deficit linked to disability of 50%, larger than that linked to other factors. A third of out of school children were disabled compared with just up to 2% of children overall. A 1998 UNESCO study⁴ found only 1-2% of disabled children in school. Similar problems apply to orphans and other vulnerable children. Richer urban children are much more likely to be in school than are slum children, rural children and working children, by factors between 20% and 100%. Some urban schools have low PTRs and small class sizes, some have class sizes over 100, and some rural schools have a drastic shortage of teachers. There are few social protection programmes in the sector, particularly in forms other than school feeding.

¹ Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality study of competence in literacy and numeracy

² The Progress in Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006

³ World Bank report *Disability, Poverty, and Schooling in Developing Countries, January 2008*

⁴ UNESCO 1998, *From Special Needs Education to Education for All*

3. OVERARCHING INITIATIVES

High Level Group (HLG) on Education for All

The HLG, involving many EU and AU member states, holds annual meetings at Ministerial level to sustain and accelerate the political momentum towards the EFA goals and serve as a lever for resource mobilization. Three EFA goals relate directly to the EAP: 2 (access), 5 (gender equity) and 6 (quality). Other EFA goals are not explicit in the EAP: 1 (early Childhood Care and Education), 3 (lifelong learning) and 4 (adult literacy). The December 2008 HLG endorsed the creation of a global Task Force on Teachers covering Activity 3 of the EAP.

Education for All Fast Track Initiative (FTI)

FTI focuses on the education MDGs (EFA goal 2). The FTI 'catalytic fund' has used finance from the EC and EU Member States (MS) to support 22 African with FTI endorsed plans.

Second Decade for Education in Africa (SDEA)

This AU initiative focuses on the following, items overlapping explicitly with the EAP being shown in italics: *gender* and culture; education management information systems; *teacher development*; higher education; technical and vocational education and training (TVET); development of the curriculum and *learning materials*; *quality management*. The first EAP activity supports SDEA implementation.

Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA)

ADEA is hosted by the African Development Bank, has signed an MoU with the AU, and is supported by the EC and some EU MS both financially and through membership of the Steering Committee and Working Groups. The latter have included three of direct relevance to EAP: 'The Teaching Profession', 'Books and Learning Materials', and Girls' Education, the latter becoming the highly influential *Forum for African Women Educationalists* (FAWE).

Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

The UK and a number of Commonwealth countries in Africa are members. The 2006-2009 education plan focuses on quality assurance, teacher development, alternative forms of schooling, new approaches to higher education and the creation of expertise in eLearning.

4. EAP ACTIVITIES

1. **Strategic Partnership mechanism for implementing the SDEA**

It could be argued that this has now been completed with ADEA providing the required partnership mechanism. ADEA has signed an MoU to support implementation of the SDEA plan of action, and SDEA support is one of ADEA's strategic objectives with a logical framework for its implementation. In addition, the European Development Fund (EDF) is supporting the AU Commission (AUC) for the development of the *Gender/Culture* and *EMIS* strategies and potentially other aspects of the SDEA.

On the other hand, there is little in the EAP activities to achieve the intended outcome of improved management systems other than through the *EMIS* and *Quality Management* components of the SDEA Plan of Action. Education governance is key to the MDGs. World Bank literature shows the importance of quality management involving accountability and incentives as a key requirement for achieving quality. The 2009 EFA GMR also stresses the role of governance in achieving equity whilst cautioning against over-simplistic approaches to management decentralisation, accountability and incentives. Are these issues that should be discussed in the context of the EAP and SDEA? Should the *Strategic Partnership mechanism for implementing SDEA* also involve partnerships and networks in Africa, ensuring strategies at EU-AUC level are closely attuned to in-country developments and partnerships in AU MS?

2. **Eliminating school fees**

Lobbying and support is being provided through the FTI, the UNICEF School Fee Abolition Initiative and through EC and EU MS budget to a number of AU education sectors. Yet most African countries still charge fees (reintroduced in Botswana at secondary level). In many with legal guarantees of free education, fees are still charged. UNICEF has studied outcomes in countries eliminating fees, but less so the impediments to implementing this EFA commitment.

3 & 8. **Training, deployment and retention of teachers; Infrastructure & learning materials**

Most education projects in SSA include support in these areas. In a survey of World Bank education projects by the GMR 2009 team, all the 10 projects in Africa included infrastructure and teacher training and 8 included learning materials. This is appropriate: the EU Agenda for Action on MDGs foresees the hiring and training of 6 million more teachers (globally) by 2010. There has been less attention to, and achievements in, teacher deployment and management, on measures to combat low teacher morale and reduce absenteeism and attrition.

Accountability and incentives are important issues in relation to teachers. But incentives are not necessarily financial; accountability is not just about teacher accountability to parents but also accountability of education system managers to schools in providing and paying teachers and providing an adequate teaching environment. The EAP could benefit from the work of the ADEA Teaching Profession Working Group on Teacher Management and Support (TMS).

4, 5,11 **Social protection; programmes for vulnerable children; best practice for disability**

A number of EU MS are supporting social protection programmes. The AUC is organising national and regional consultations on social protection feeding into a Conference of Social Development Ministers. The emphasis is often on school feeding. With the present economic climate, attention should be given to all forms of social protection, and to the place of school-based social protection programmes in relation to decentralised management and financing.

Several EU MS have programmes for vulnerable children including physically disabled, AIDS patients and orphans. The UK trains its country offices to mainstream attention to disability, and there is a civil society initiative developing tools to promote attention to disability. What appears to be receiving little attention is the management and financing of the adult and non-formal education subsector. This is typically weak and underfunded. Yet it is vital for mainstreaming education provision to vulnerable children and all categories of those who are not in school, including the huge numbers dropping out of formal education. There are many examples of adult and non-formal education enabling these children to gain an equivalence of primary education and take advantage of pathways to formal education where these exist. The EuropeAid website on Education stresses the importance of such pathways.

Whilst civil society are working to develop mechanisms to encourage greater attention to children and adults with disabilities, there is as yet little attention to exchanging best practice.

6. **Promoting life skills for HIV/AIDS and health education**

There is now general appreciation amongst AU and EU MS that education is vital for combating HIV. Several EU MS are supporting programmes directly and through UNICEF and UNAIDS.

7. **Girls' Enrolment and completion at all levels of education**

This vital initiative is being taken forward through EU MS support to the implementation of the FAWE strategic plan and through bilateral projects.

9. **Twining and other exchanges towards the MDGs**

EC and EU MS support for this focuses on HE twinning initiatives to support education research and an improved quality of teacher training.

10. **Capacity strengthening of IPED**

ADEA and EDF are seen as the potential means of providing this support to IPED.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Africa is off-target for the education and gender MDGs. But the EAP is in many respects a well targeted regional agenda to help rectify this. Almost all activities are being supported by EU member states, often via existing regional initiatives. ADEA and the EDF are giving impetus to the Action Plan for the Second Decade of Education in Africa. Some countries have eliminated school fees, but user costs in most countries are still major deterrents to primary school completion. There is major ongoing support to infrastructure, teaching and learning materials and teacher training, in line with the EU Agenda for Action, though less to teacher deployment and retention. Support to gender equity is to benefit from the significant expertise of FAWE, and HIV/AIDS education from UNAIDS and UNICEF.

However, there appear to be some gaps in the definition and implementation of the action plan which could hinder its achievement of the EAP objectives. These gaps fall largely in the area of governance of the education sector. Increasing attention is being drawn to the need for better sectoral governance to achieve the MDGs, tackle equity and improve quality. Should it therefore play a stronger and more explicit role in the EAP? And should the EAP and SDEA take more account of the need for strong partnerships within the EU and AU, between the respective Commissions and Member States, especially within Africa, to facilitate the implementation of their agendas? The following recommendations focus on these questions.

Recommendations:

1. Consider whether to give more explicit attention to system governance (e.g. efficient, transparent management, accountability and incentives) including through the following:
 - Activity 1:* ADEA and other support to SDEA programmes on EMIS and Quality Management;
 - Activity 2:* Investigate why countries are not implementing 'free' education, especially management constraints;
 - Activity 3:* Give more attention to Teacher Management, building on the ADEA working group on the Teaching Profession and taking advantage of the new HLG Task Force on Teachers;
 - Activity 4:* Examine school based management issues in operating a wide range of school-based social protection programmes including, but not limited to, food distribution and the activities of the World Food Programme;
 - Activity 5:* Examine the needs for improved management and funding of the adult and non-formal education subsector to provide for vulnerable, out-of-school children and children who have dropped out of school, including pathways to formal education
2. Consider options for further strengthening networking and partnerships within Africa on SDEA under the '*Strategic Partnership mechanism for implementing SDEA*'.