The State of the World's Children 1999

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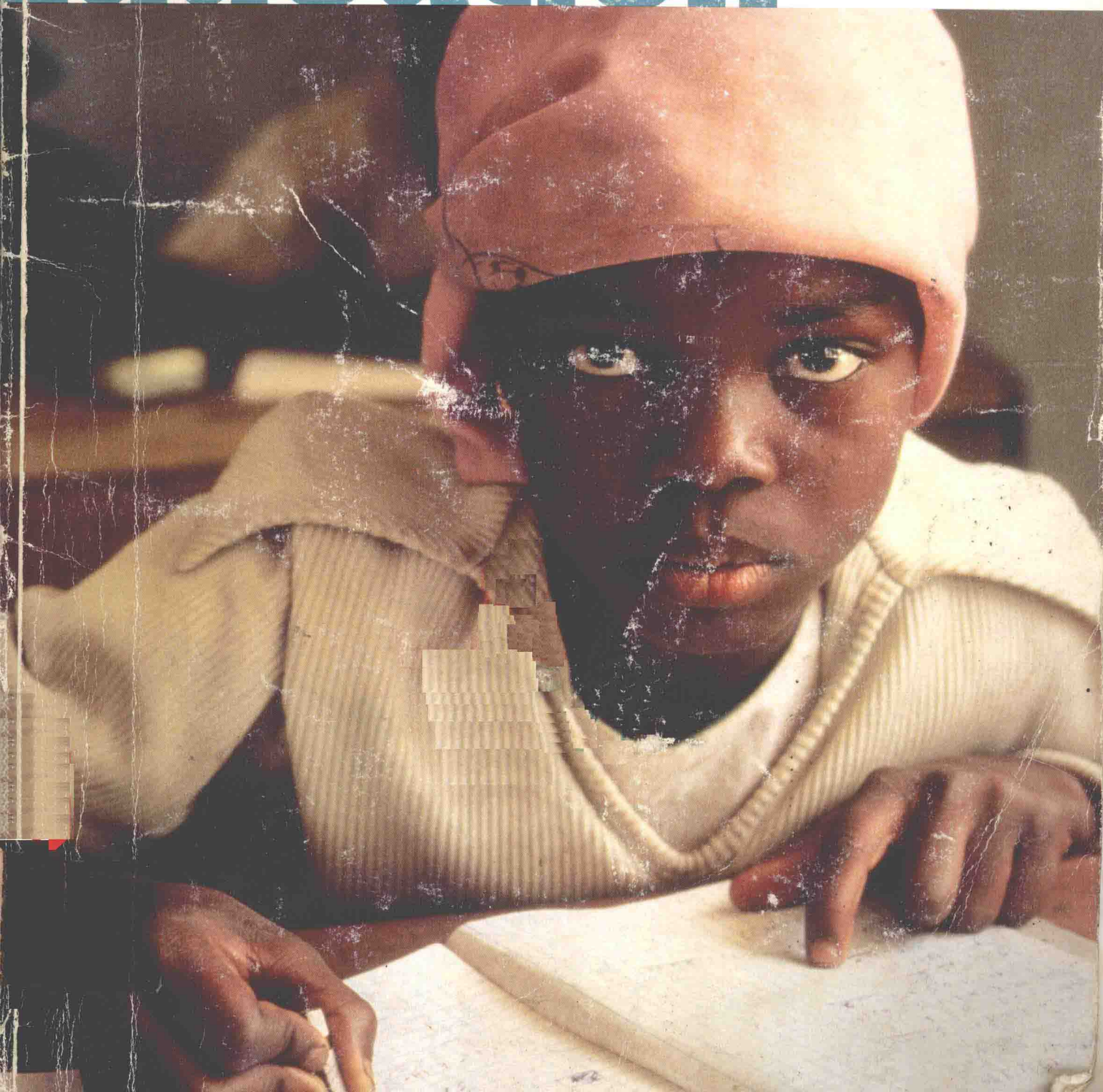
Education



THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 1999

Carol Bellamy, Executive Director,
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The State of the World's Children 1999 reports on the efforts of the international community to ensure that all its children enjoy their human right to a high-quality education — efforts that are resulting in an 'education revolution'. The goal of this worldwide movement: Education For All. 5

Towards that end, the work of governments, non-governmental organizations, educators, communities, parents and children is informed by a definition of education that includes, but goes far beyond, schooling. Within this definition, education is an essential human right, a force for social change — and the single most vital element in combating poverty, empowering women, safeguarding children from exploitative and hazardous labour and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment and controlling population growth. Education is a path towards international peace and security.

This chapter includes examples of initiatives that meet the child's right to education at the international, regional, national and local levels. It is divided into three sections.

The right to education: This section explores the historical context in which children's right to education has been repeatedly affirmed, for example, in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1990 World Summit for Children and the 1990 World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien (Thailand). 7

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Foreword

Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development.

Yet, as *The State of the World's Children 1999* report points out, 130 million children in the developing world are denied this right — almost two thirds of them girls. Nearly 1 billion people, or a sixth of the world's population, are illiterate — the majority of them women. This is a violation of rights and a loss of potential and productivity that the world can no longer tolerate.

Half a century ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights spelled out a global vision for peace and prosperity that included the right to education. The Convention on the Rights of the Child — the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history — enshrines the right of all children to a primary education that will give them the skills they need to continue learning throughout life.

This report demonstrates that the right to education is guiding classroom practice, shaping curricula and finding practical expression in schools around the world. It is establishing schools as oases of respect and encouragement for children. It is giving us classrooms where the principles of democracy are upheld and embraced. It is contributing to enhanced retention rates and reduced drop-out rates.

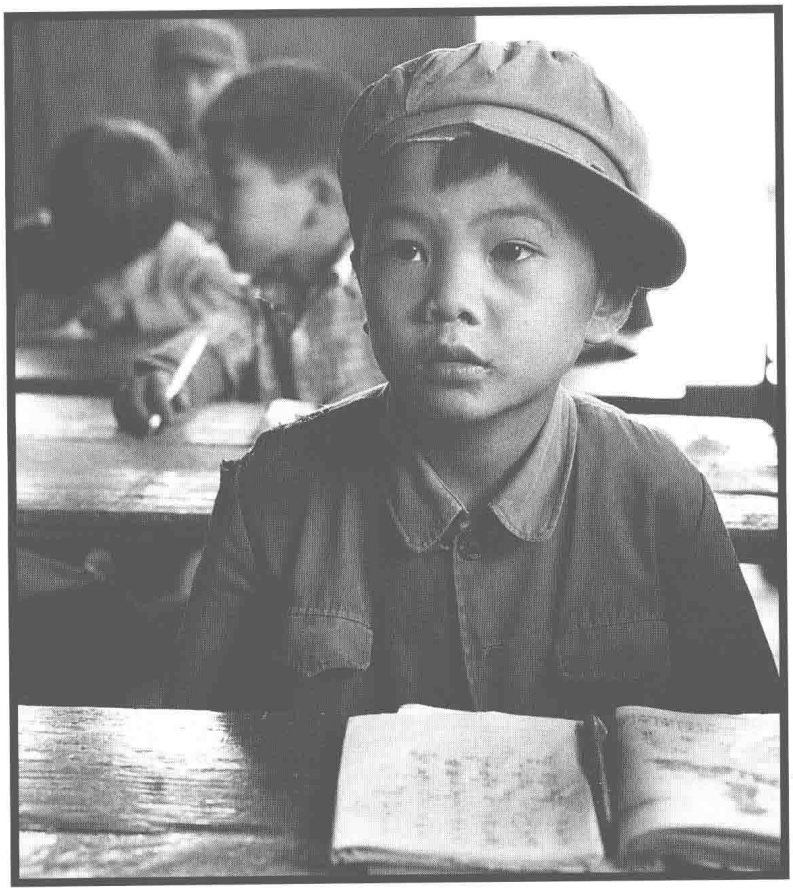
Motivated students leave school more prepared to take up the reins of the future; they are better empowered to improve their own lives and, later, the lives of their children.

When the right to education is assured, the whole world gains. There is no instant solution to the violations of that right, but it begins with a simple proposition: that on the eve of the 21st century, there is no higher priority, no mission more important, than that of Education For All.

Kofi A. Annan
Secretary-General of the United Nations

Chapter I

Education For All: Making the right a reality



UNICEF/92-0052/Lemoyne

A primary school student in China.

The right to education

Nearly a billion people will enter the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names — much less operate a computer or understand a simple application form. And they will live, as now, in more desperate poverty and poorer health than most of those who can. They are the world's functional illiterates — and their numbers are growing.[1]

The consequences of illiteracy are profound, even potentially life-threatening. They flow from the denial of a fundamental human right: the right to education, proclaimed in agreements ranging from the 50-year-old Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the world's most universally embraced human rights instrument.

Yet despite these ringing affirmations over the past half-century, an estimated 855 million people — nearly one sixth of humanity — will be functionally illiterate on the eve of the millennium.[2] At the same time, over 130 million children of school age in the developing world are growing up without access to basic education,[3] while millions of others languish in sub-standard learning situations where little learning takes place (Figs. 1-3). Girls crowd these ranks disproportionately, representing nearly two of every three children in the developing world who do not receive a primary education (approximately 73 million of the 130 million out-of-school children).[4]

Ensuring the right of education is a matter of morality, justice and economic sense. There is an unmistakable correlation between education and mortality rates, especially child mortality. The implications for girls' education are particularly critical.

A 10 percentage point increase in girls' primary enrolment can be expected to decrease infant mortality by 4.1 deaths per 1,000, and a similar rise in girls' secondary enrolment by another 5.6 deaths per 1,000.[5]

This would mean concretely, in Pakistan, for example, that an extra year of schooling for an additional 1,000 girls would ultimately prevent roughly 60 infant deaths.[6]

The implications of the lack of schooling, however, go further.

Each extra year of school for girls can also translate into a reduction in fertility rates, as well as a decrease in maternal deaths in childbirth. In Brazil, illiterate women have an average of 6.5 children, whereas those with secondary education have 2.5 children.

Photo: Learning to write, as these girls are doing in Bogotá, is an opportunity denied more than 130 million children without access to basic education. Nearly two thirds of them are girls.

Article 28

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

(a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;

(b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;

(c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;

(d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;

(e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

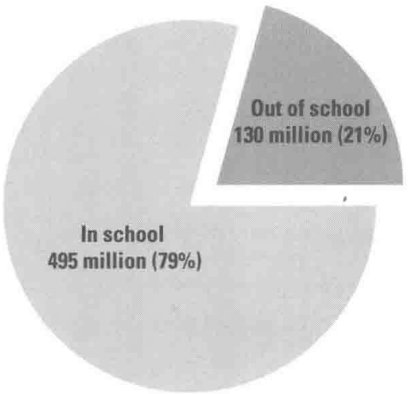
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.

3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international co-operation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

— from the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Fig. 1 Children out of school

There are about 130 million primary school age children in developing countries who do not attend school, out of a total of about 625 million children of this age group in these countries.



Source: *Facts & Figures 1998*, UNICEF, New York, 1998; and *World Population Prospects, The 1996 Revision*, United Nations, New York, 1997.

In the southern Indian state of Kerala, where literacy is universal, the infant mortality rate is the lowest in the entire developing world — and the fertility rate is the lowest in India.[7]

The denial of the right to education hurts people's capacity to work productively, to sustain and protect themselves and their families. Those who understand the importance of health, sanitation and nutrition help to lower their families' incidence of preventable illness and death, while increasing their potential for economic productivity and financial and social stability.

On a society-wide scale, the denial of education harms the cause of democracy and social progress — and, by extension, international peace and security. By impairing the full development of children, illiteracy makes it more difficult for them to make their way in society as adults in a spirit of understanding, peace and gender equality among all peoples and groups.

And there is another, harder-to-measure, consequence: For the functionally illiterate, the joys and revelations of the vast world of art and of other cultures — indeed, the love of learning itself — are largely beyond reach.

Illiteracy begins as a sad fact of daily life for millions of children who are, more often than not, girls. The reasons are numerous. For girls, their gender alone may keep them home, locked in subsistence chores — or so isolated in the classroom that they become discouraged and drop out. For tens of millions of children, girls and boys alike, education is beyond reach because they are full-time workers, many toiling in hazardous and exploitative forms of child labour. For others, there may simply be no school for them to attend, or if there is, it fails to ensure their right to education. There may be too few qualified teachers, or a child's family may not be able to afford the fees. The school may be too far from home. Or it may lack books and supplies.

Even those children fortunate enough to be enrolled may find themselves in a cheerless, overcrowded and threatening place, an environment that endangers rather than empowers them and crushes their initiative and curiosity.

Over 150 million children in developing countries start school but do not reach grade five.[8] They are not emerging with the literacy, numeracy and life skills that are the foundation for learning throughout life.

The question of quality

It is not enough simply to ensure that children attend school. The quality of education is also of paramount concern. *How* knowledge, skills and values are transmitted is as important as *what* is learned.

Children must also be able to participate fully in the educational process. They need to be treated with dignity and allowed to develop from their school experience a level of self-esteem, self-discipline and sheer enjoyment of learning that will stand them in good stead throughout their lives.

This applies particularly to girls, who often find patterns of social discrimination against them repeated in classrooms, where they are not called on in class, and where they are shunted into less challenging areas of study and undervalued by teachers, by male classmates and by the general school culture.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is clear: Every child has the right to quality education that is relevant to her or his individual development and life. But demands even for access cannot be assured in much of the developing world. In many areas, there is little in the way of resources —

or incentive — for schools to make themselves more relevant and appealing to students.

In many countries, particularly the lowest-income countries, the result is a pervasive grimness in the physical environment and the intellectual atmosphere of learning environments. Sometimes there is not even a chalkboard. Classrooms in rural areas tend to be roughly constructed. With daylight the only illumination, the rooms are dim. Conditions are often only marginally better in poor urban schools.

Overcrowding is common, especially in the early grades and in urban areas. In a number of countries, only two of every five pupils in grade one have a place to sit. A teacher in Bangladesh may have as many as 67 pupils; in Equatorial Guinea there may be as many as 90.[9] And many still do not have access.

Massed together, children struggle for space, for a modicum of attention from an overtaxed teacher, for a glimpse at a tattered text, often in a language they cannot grasp. Diseases and pests spread easily. With little to engage the students, teachers resort to rigid discipline and corporal punishment. What is taught often has little relevance to children's daily lives.

Teaching materials frequently reinforce stereotypes, compounding the physical problems that affect girls, such as distance from home and the lack of toilet facilities.

The poor quality of education in schools is itself a depressant on the demand for education, even where access exists. Child labour experts have found that some children would rather work than be subject to a school regime that is irrelevant to their needs.

Assane, a 10-year-old shoeshine boy interviewed in the Senegalese city of Ziguinchor, made the case clearly:

I don't need to go to school. What can I learn there? I know children who went to school. Their family paid for the fees and the uniforms and now they are educated. But you see them sitting around. Now they are useless to their families. They don't know anything about farming or trading or making money... I know I need to learn to read and write [but]... if anyone tries to put me in school, I will run away.[10]

Nevertheless, basic education remains the most important single factor in protecting children from such hazards as exploitative child labour and sexual exploitation. The case for this can be found both in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the findings of the 1997 International Conference on Child Labour, held in Oslo (Norway). In the developing world, there are estimated to be 250 million children trapped in child labour, and many of them receive no schooling whatever.

Schools in many countries have simply not been good enough to attract or retain children on the scale needed for two principal reasons: they are chronically underfinanced, and they are too expensive for the majority of the population. (These and other problems are addressed in 'Investing in human rights', on page 79.)

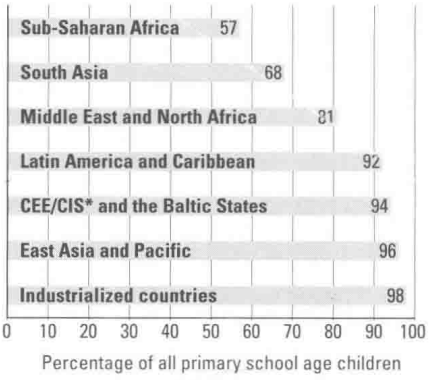
But the delivery of education itself has also been poorly organized, from overall management of school systems to the way lessons are taught in the classroom. The decreasing enrolment rates at both primary and secondary levels in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, where education was once paramount, are dramatic testimony to this.

Education and child rights

The proclamation of the right to education in the Universal Declaration of

Fig. 2 Net primary enrolment, by region (around 1995)

Net primary enrolment — the number of children enrolled in primary school as a percentage of the total number of children in the primary school age group — is a key indicator of progress towards the goal of Education For All. Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are the regions facing the greatest challenges in enrolling all their children in primary school by the year 2000.

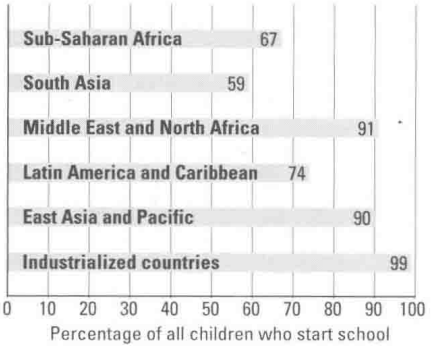


*Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Source: UNESCO and UNICEF, 1998.

Fig. 3 Reaching grade five, by region (around 1995)

In addition to those millions of children who do not attend school, many others start school but do not reach grade five. Completion of grade four is considered one indication of minimal education attainment. Note the difference in pattern when this chart is compared to the one on net primary enrolment (Fig. 2).



Note: Data for Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Baltic States were not available.

Source: *The State of the World's Children 1999*, UNICEF, New York, 1998 (Table 4).

Regional Spotlight

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Enrolment: From only 25 per cent in 1960, the regional primary enrolment rate climbed to nearly 60 per cent by 1980. After declining in the 1980s, enrolment is again close to 60 per cent. Over 40 million primary school age children are not in school. In nine countries, rural primary enrolment lags significantly behind urban, with the gap ranging from 26 percentage points in the Central African Republic to 49 percentage points in Burkina Faso.

Gender: In 1960, almost twice as many boys as girls in the region attended primary school. The gap has narrowed considerably, with girls' primary attendance rate now 57 per cent and boys' 61 per cent. Benin has the greatest disparity in primary enrolment, with the girls' rate about 30 percentage points less than boys'. Only a third of women in the region were literate in 1980; now, nearly half are literate.

Effectiveness: In the region, one third of children enrolled in primary school drop out before reaching grade five. Chad, Comoros, the Congo and Gabon, with more than one third of primary school students repeating grades, are among countries with high repetition rates.

Constraints: Armed conflicts and economic pressures from debt and structural adjustment policies have taken a severe toll on education. The region includes over 30 heavily indebted countries, and governments spend as much on debt repayment as on health and basic education combined — $12 billion in 1996, and per capita education spending is less than half that of 1980. Large class sizes, poor teacher education, crumbling buildings and lack of learning materials in a number of countries all reduce the quality of education.

Progress and innovations: Among countries achieving primary enrolment rates of 90 per cent or more are: Botswana, Cape Verde, Malawi, Mauritius, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Malawi made primary education free in 1994, and the attendance rate is now over 80 per cent. When Uganda made primary education free for four children per family in 1997, enrolment doubled from 2.6 million to 5.2 million. The African Girls' Education Initiative works with governments and communities in over 20 countries to boost girls' enrolment.

Regional Spotlight

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Enrolment: In 1970, about half of primary school age children were enrolled. Now, about four out of five children are in school. Oman, with no education system prior to 1970, has about 70 per cent of primary school age children in school. In Morocco, only about a third of children of this age group in rural areas are in school, less than half the rate in urban areas, and rural enrolment in Upper Egypt is about 20 percentage points less than in Lower Egypt.

Gender: In 1960, only a third of girls in the region attended primary school, compared with two thirds of boys. Now, about three quarters of primary school age girls are enrolled. The gap between girls' and boys' rates is more than 10 percentage points. Yemen has the greatest gender gap, with the girls' primary attendance rate over 30 percentage points less than boys'. Bahrain, Cyprus, Iran, Jordan, Libya and Tunisia have high primary enrolment rates and parity, or close to it, between boys and girls.

Effectiveness: About 9 out of 10 children who start primary school reach grade five, though high drop-out and repetition rates are a concern in some countries.

Constraints: Conflicts in Algeria, Sudan and the West Bank and Gaza have disrupted education, and sanctions against Iraq have led to school closings, loss of teachers and increased drop-outs. Improved teacher training and curricula are needed to upgrade the quality of education in the region. Though the portion of expenditures by the region's central governments allocated to education have been high, education spending has recently fallen. Nearly half the countries in the region have not ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, a concern because the denial of women's rights affects girls' education.

Progress and innovations: Iran is promoting education for women and girls in rural areas, with girls' primary attendance now over 90 per cent. Programmes in Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen are bringing education to girls in poor areas through community schools located closer to their homes.

Human Rights was the beginning of a broad effort by the United Nations to promote social, economic and cultural rights in tandem with civil and political rights (Fig. 4).

The indivisibility of these rights is guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a result, what were once seen as the *needs* of children have been elevated to something far harder to ignore: their *rights*.

The Convention became binding international law on 2 September 1990, nine months after its adoption by the United Nations General Assembly; it has now been ratified by 191 countries. No other human rights instrument has ever won such widespread support in so short a time.

Ratified by all but two nations (Somalia and the United States), the Convention's acceptance means that 96 per cent of the world's children live in countries that are legally bound to guarantee the full spectrum of child rights: civil, political, social, cultural and economic.

Article 28 recognizes the right of children to education, requiring States parties, among other things, to provide free, compulsory, basic schooling, and to protect the child's dignity in all disciplinary matters, and to promote international cooperation in educational matters. Article 29 calls on governments to ensure that education leads to the fullest possible development of each child's ability and to respect for the child's parents and cultural identity and for human rights.

Quality education can hinge on something as simple as providing a child with a pencil where there are none. And at the most fundamental level, the fact of access itself is a priceless opportunity for a child deprived of education.

The vision of education enshrined in the Convention and other human rights instruments recognizes the right of education as the underpinning for

the practice of democratic citizenship. The Convention is thus a guide to the kind of education that is essential both to children's development and to social progress.

The Convention's perspective on quality education encompasses not only children's cognitive needs but also their physical, social, emotional, moral and spiritual development. Education so conceived unfolds from the child's perspective and addresses each child's unique capacities and needs.

The vision of educational quality enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child extends to issues of gender equality, equity, health and nutrition, parental and community involvement, and management of the education system itself.

Above all, it demands that schools be zones of safety for children, places where they can expect to find not only safe water and decent sanitation facilities, but also a respectful environment.

Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention are buttressed by four other articles that assert overarching principles of law. All have far-reaching ramifications, particularly in terms of what is needed to mould an education system — or an individual school. These are article 2, on non-discrimination; article 3, on the best interests of the child; article 6, on the child's right to life, survival and development; and article 12, on the views of the child.[11]

Article 12, for example, which assures children the right to express their own views freely in matters that affect them, requires major policy changes in the many schools that currently deny children the opportunity to question decisions or influence school policy.

But the rewards are vast: Schools that encourage critical thinking and democratic participation contribute to fostering an understanding of the essence of human rights. And this, in turn, can make education an enabling force not just for individuals, but for society as a whole, bringing to life the entire range of human rights.

The non-discrimination principle as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child has similarly profound ramifications. It is aimed at assuring that all children have access to relevant and meaningful education, regardless of their background, where they live or what language they speak.

The non-discrimination principle is key to combating gender discrimination. Schools must ensure that they are responsive to girls' needs in every possible way, from physical location to classroom curriculum and practice. They must also treat gender inequality not as a matter of tradition but rather as an issue of human rights discrimination that can and must be addressed.

In addition, schools must consciously promote acceptance and understanding of children who are different and give students the intellectual and social tools needed to oppose xenophobia, sexism, racism and other negative attitudes.[12]

Learning from the past

Education topped the national agendas of many newly independent countries of the developing world in the 1960s and 1970s as a core strategy to erase disparities, unify nations and fuel the engine of development.

"Education," said Julius Nyerere, a former schoolteacher who became the first President of the United Republic of Tanzania, "is not a way of escaping the country's poverty. It is a way of fighting it."[13]

UNESCO, the United Nations organization with specific responsibility for education, organized a series of ground-breaking regional conferences in Karachi in 1960, Addis Ababa in

Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

(e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

2. No part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principles set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

— from the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Fig. 4 International milestones for education

1948 (Dec.) The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** is adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. Education is declared a basic right of all people.

1959 (Nov.) The **Declaration on the Rights of the Child** is adopted by the UN General Assembly. Education is declared the right of every child.

1960-1966 UNESCO holds four **World Regional Conferences on Education** that help establish time-bound regional goals to provide free and compulsory primary education to all children. The meetings are held in Karachi (1960), Addis Ababa (1961), Santiago (1962) and Tripoli (1966).

1969 (Jan.) The **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination** enters into force, proclaiming the right of all to education, regardless of race or ethnicity.

1976 (Jan.) The **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** enters into force, guaranteeing the right to education for all.

1979 (Jan.) The **International Year of the Child** is designated to reinvigorate the principles of the Declaration on the Rights of the Child and raise awareness of children's special needs.

1980 **Primary enrolment doubles in Latin America and Asia and triples in Africa**, but the goal of universal primary education by 1980 is unmet. Of all 6- to 11-year-olds, approximately one third in developing countries and about one twelfth in industrialized countries are not in school. The target year of 1980 had been set by the UNESCO World Regional Conferences on Education, held between 1960 and 1966.

1981 (Sept.) The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women** enters into force, calling for the elimination of discrimination against women and for equal rights in education.

1982 **Debt crisis begins.** Commercial banks stop lending to developing countries after several countries announce that they will suspend debt service payments. IMF and the World Bank begin to refinance existing loans, requiring structural adjustments. Public-sector services, including education, are severely affected.

1985 (July) The **Third World Conference on Women** (Nairobi). Education is declared the basis for improving the status of women. Participating governments agree to encourage the elimination of discriminatory gender stereotypes from educational material, to redesign textbooks to present a positive image of women and to include women's studies in the curriculum.

1990 (Mar.) The **World Conference on Education for All** (Jomtien). The conference, co-sponsored by UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank and, later, UNFPA, presented a global consensus on an expanded vision of basic education.

(Sept.) The **Convention on the Rights of the Child** enters into force, codifying the right to education for all children into international law.

(Sept.) The **World Summit for Children** (New York). 159 countries agree on a series of goals for education, including universal access to basic education and completion of primary education by at least 80 per cent of primary school age children by the year 2000.

(Dec.) The **International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families**, adopted by the UN General Assembly (but not yet in force), declares education as a right of the children of all migrant workers and guest labourers.

1993 (Dec.) The **E-9 Education Summit** (New Delhi). Representatives of the Governments of the nine most populous nations in the developing world (Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan) pledge to achieve the goal of universal primary education by the year 2000. Together, these countries account for half of the world's population and 70 per cent of illiterate adults.

(Dec.) The **United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities**, adopted by the UN General Assembly, declares that States should recognize the principle of equal educational opportunities at all levels for children, youths and adults with disabilities.

1994 (June) The **World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Equality** (Salamanca). Participants declare that all countries should incorporate special needs education into their domestic education strategy.

(Sept.) The **International Conference on Population and Development** (Cairo). Participants call for the provision of universal access to high-quality primary, technical and non-formal education by 2015, with a particular emphasis on girls' education.

1995 (Mar.) The **World Summit for Social Development** (Copenhagen). Participating States commit themselves to promote and attain universal and equitable access to quality education to help eradicate poverty, promote employment and foster social integration, with a particular emphasis on girls' education.

(Sept.) The **Fourth World Conference on Women** (Beijing). The conference calls for the elimination of discrimination in education at all levels, for the creation of gender-sensitive education systems and for equal educational and training opportunities for women. The critical impact of girls' education is emphasized.

1996 (June) **Mid-decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All** (Amman). Meeting assesses progress towards the year 2000 goals set at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All.

1997 (Oct.) The **International Conference on Child Labour** (Oslo). Participating governments declare all work that interferes with the child's education unacceptable and agree to create time-bound programmes for high-quality universal and compulsory basic education, with a particular emphasis on girls' education.

1961, Santiago in 1962 and Tripoli in 1966. Out of these conferences came the first clear statistical portrait of global education levels. It was a dismaying picture.

In 1960, fewer than half the developing world's children aged 6 to 11 were enrolled in primary school, compared with 91 per cent in the industrialized world.[14] In sub-Saharan Africa, where the picture was bleakest, only 1 child in 20 went to secondary school.[15]

The UNESCO conferences set clear, bold targets. All eligible children were to be enrolled in primary school by 1980, and by 1970 in Latin America, where existing conditions were better. The result was dramatic. By 1980, primary enrolment had more than doubled in Asia and Latin America; in Africa it had tripled.

However, populations surged over the same period. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, it was thought that 33 million extra school places would be needed by 1980. In the end, 45 million places were provided, but this heroic effort still left the continent 11 million short of the number needed for all children of primary school age.[16]

The rapid onset of the debt crises of the developing world, which earned the 1980s the label of 'the lost decade', brought progress to an abrupt halt. Crippled by debt repayments and plunging prices that carried their export commodities earnings to their lowest levels in 50 years by the middle of 1987,[17] countries began slashing expenditures, including their spending on education.

Between 1980 and 1987 in Latin America and the Caribbean, real spending on education per inhabitant decreased by around 40 per cent. In sub-Saharan Africa, it fell by a catastrophic 65 per cent.[18]

As a result, access to education did not increase sufficiently — and educational quality plunged as well. And teachers in much of Africa and Latin America found themselves earning far less in real terms at the end of the 1980s than they had a decade earlier.[19]

Amid these setbacks, a major new United Nations initiative, the World Conference on Education for All, was convened in Jomtien (Thailand) in March 1990, with the crucial goal of reviving the world's commitment to educating all of its citizens.

The Jomtien conference

The World Conference on Education for All, sponsored by UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank,* set out to accomplish for education what the International Conference on Primary Health Care (Alma Ata, 1978) had achieved for health. It called for universal quality education, with a particular focus on the world's poorest citizens.

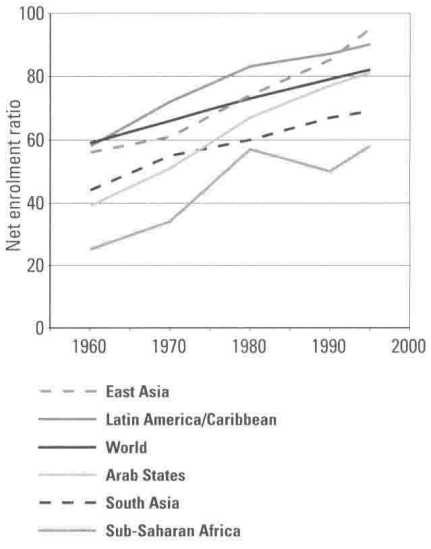
The Jomtien conference marked a significant shift in the world's collective approach to education, broadening the notion of quality 'basic education' along with an understanding of its delivery. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that Jomtien marked the emergence of an international consensus that education is the single most vital element in combating poverty, empowering women, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment and controlling population growth. That consensus is why, in 1996, donor countries committed themselves to the task of helping developing countries ensure universal primary education by the year 2015.[20]

Previously, education had been assessed in terms of gross enrolment rates at primary, secondary and tertiary

*UNFPA joined as the fifth UN sponsoring agency, after the Conference.

Fig. 5 Net primary enrolment, by region (1960-2000)

The number of children enrolled in primary school continues to increase both globally and for all regions of the developing world. Nevertheless, the goal of Education For All by the year 2000 will remain elusive in most regions. Data for Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Baltic States were not available.



Source: UNESCO and UNICEF, 1998.