

Education for All in Africa: What G8 Nations Should Do.

What is the challenge facing Africa?

Today more than 40 million children in Sub-Saharan Africa, a majority of them girls, are not in school. Although enrolment rates have risen in the past five years, the rate at which Sub-Saharan African countries are moving towards the Millennium Development goal (MDG) of ensuring that every child gets a decent primary education is far too slow. In fact, the first of all the MDGs -- achieving gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005 -- has already been missed in many African countries. On present trends it will be 150 years before every boy and girl in Africa is in school. Nineteen of the 28 countries off track for meeting the goal of giving every child a good quality basic education by 2015 are in Africa.

In missing an education, children in Africa do not simply miss out on the opportunity to be literate and numerate. They also lose a chance to have greater control over their economic and social life-chances, their health and their participation in decision-making at the community and national levels. In addition, research has long shown that giving girls' a basic education significantly enhances the health and wellbeing of future generations of children. More recent studies suggest that basic education has an equally profound impact on rates of HIV/AIDs in Africa: if every girl and boy received a complete primary school education, 7 million cases of HIV could be prevented in a decade.

What did the Commission Say?

The Africa Commission recommends a substantial increase in financing for basic education from the international community - US\$7 to 8 billion per year. It argues that the international community has a responsibility to ensure that every child in Africa has a chance to go to school.

International funding would be used to remove school fees in basic education -- currently a substantial barrier to participation for many children in Africa. The Africa Commission also recommends the development of specific initiatives to support national strategies to increase girls' access and retention in basic education.

Finally, the Commission recommends that donors commit to teacher training to bring down the teacher-child ratio to under 1: 40 in basic education, and fund regional networks to help support African governments in developing more appropriate and relevant curricula.

What are the facts?

- The international commitment to provide every child with a free, quality basic education by 2015 is among the most achievable of the Millennium Development Goals.
- Only 39% of all aid to education in 2002 went to sub-Saharan Africa, which faces 75% of the education-financing gap. Bilateral aid to basic education in Africa has averaged only about \$500m a year since 2000 – or about \$4.60 for every school-age child in the region.
- Over the past five years, primary school enrolments have risen in many African countries, as government after government waived school fees and recommitted itself to universal access. As a result, an estimated 17 million more African children are in school.
- However, the flood of new enrolments has seriously stretched the capacity of African governments to sustain good quality instruction. In many countries children sit in classes of 80-100 or more, and are without buildings, chairs, or books
- Without debt relief and open access to rich country markets African governments will be unable to fund universal access to free, good quality public education. Last year, African nations spent more than \$13 billion on debt payments to wealthy creditors including the IMF and World Bank. This is more than they spent on health care and education or received in foreign aid.
- Only a very small of proportion of aid to education actually reaches primary schools. In 2000, donors allocated only 10 cents in every education aid dollar to basic education in Africa, and of that they stipulated that an estimated 7 cents had to be spent on 'technical cooperation' (capacity building, seminars, research, and consultancies). This leaves only 3 cents to train and pay teachers, buy books or build classrooms.
- On current trends, external resources will be essential for closing the education gap in sub-Saharan African countries by 2015. In 2003, aid to basic education was still just \$1.7 billion; about another \$5.5 billion per year is needed. Much more of this aid must be provided in the form of direct budgetary support to education – currently an estimated 70% of aid to education is tied to services and expertise from donor countries.

What has Canada done to date?

From 2000 to 2005, Canada quadrupled its investment in basic education. At the end of the five-year period, this resulted in a total expenditure of CDN\$ 555 million. In 2002, the Prime Minister also announced that Canada would double its aid to basic education in Africa to \$100 million by 2005. Canada also promised to untie its aid to basic education and give more of its aid in the form of direct budgetary support. These promises have been met. However, Canada still has some way to go before it fully contributes its fair share of the funding gap for basic education in Africa.

What are we asking the G8 in their strategy to support development for Africa?

Children can't wait at the school gates forever. At the current rate of progress, Africa will not get every child into school until after 2100. The G8 must seize the opportunity of the 2005 Summit to make quality education free and accessible for all girls and boys by increasing aid and canceling debt.

G8 countries must to ensure that by 2010 at the latest, an additional \$5.5 billion per year is mobilized to support primary education in developing countries (about half of this for Africa). In addition, they must commit to providing aid to education in forms that are untied, responsive to solid national plans for the education sector, and supportive of the direct recurrent costs of financing basic education.

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