



Realising peoples' rights through the Financing for development conference: the case of education

It would cost around 30 US cents per child per day to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on education. Even these goals fall short of the goals established by the World Education Forum in Dakar in April 2000.

Key Dakar goals

Free and compulsory basic education for all, and the halving of adult illiteracy by 2015

The elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005

The extension of learning opportunities for adults and young people, and quality improvements in all aspects of education

The Dakar Framework for Action set out a comprehensive vision of education, that acknowledged" that every child, youth and adult has the human right to benefit from an education that will meet their basic learning needs in the best and fullest sense of the term.... It is an education geared to tapping each person's talents and potential.... so that they can improve their lives and transform their societies."

The draft outcome document sadly falls far short of this vision. Its vision is of education merely as a means to an end rather than as a right and an end in itself. That we all have the right to quality relevant education should be **clearly stated in the opening paragraph in the section on "Increasing international financial cooperation for development"** (p.5). However, the draft outcome document should go one step further and should be more explicit overall about the role of all governments in supporting the achievement of the MDGs. They embody a series of rights that are currently denied to millions. It is the explicit acknowledgement of the MDGs as rights in themselves that makes the case for financing development and for a campaign in support of the MDGs so compelling. As such, **financing the MDGs should provide the rationale for all the leading actions and not just that of a single section on ODA.**

The right to free and compulsory education has been recognised as a fundamental right since the adoption of the Declaration on Human Rights in 1948. The MDGs are aiming for the less ambitious target of universal primary education by 2015 and the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education "preferably" by 2005. The Zedillo panel report estimated that achieving these two goals would cost \$12 billion per year. This is less than double the amount spent annually on ice cream in the US.

Education is widely recognised as the key to poverty eradication and the driver for sustained growth. It is inadmissible therefore that in 2002 113 million primary age children - two thirds of them girls- remain out of school. Millions more receive an education of insufficient quality or duration to acquire any meaningful skills.

Although the revised draft outcome document addresses the need to revitalise ODA it fails to make a sufficiently strong link to the importance of ODA for achieving the MDGs, *especially in those countries that are furthest from achieving them.*

Having clearly acknowledged that the ultimate aim of financing for development is poverty eradication, the text must also recognise that to do this effectively aid must be focused on where it will have the greatest impact which is in those countries that are furthest from achieving the millennium and other development goals.

Mobilising support for the education for all goals through the FfD process is vital. The World Bank has estimated that 32 countries will miss the Dakar goals under the business as usual scenario. These countries urgently need extra attention and support if another generation of children is not to suffer systematic disempowerment and underdevelopment that will be the inevitable outcome of under investment in basic social services.

Education for all is not a utopian goal. At Dakar the world's governments agreed a Global Initiative (GI) through which donors will respond to countries' education development needs thereby guaranteeing that no country will fail in their efforts to achieve education for all through a lack of resources. The GI is not a new fund. Its starting point is the recognition that individual countries' efforts are central to achieving basic education for all. Currently donor support to education tends to be inadequate, fragmented, unpredictable and contradictory. These combined factors undermine ownership, limit sustainability, and distort national policy development and budget processes. The GI is intended to end this situation. It will provide a framework for governments and donors to work in genuine partnerships, establishing incentives and ongoing dialogue in place of excessive conditionality. Progress towards shared goals will be monitored and evaluated, in-country and transparently.

At the heart of the GI is a **national EFA plan of action**, owned by the government, and prepared in active collaboration with donors and civil society. This would establish a time-bound strategy for implementing free and compulsory basic education, linked to broader poverty reduction objectives. It will address both demand and supply-side constraints to education development, including quality, cost-benefit and access issues. In Dakar, countries agreed to produce these plans *by the end of this year.*

A second component of the GI is a **financing framework**. Once a country's financing needs are highlighted, bilateral and multilateral donors working in-country would agree collectively with the government to commit financial and technical resources to the plan, either in the form of project aid, support to sub-sectors, or direct budget support. In some cases, donor-government coordination at the country level would mobilise sufficient resources. However, where a financing gap remains, additional resources would need to be mobilised through wider international action, coordinated by a GI task force, comprised of representatives from participating agencies and developing country governments.

The GI would be completed by an **annual international EFA report** which would pull together and summarise the national ledgers in an accessible format, and track the development of national plans, national financing needs, and the extent and nature of government and donor support.

This conference needs to prove that it is capable of rising to the challenge of poverty eradication by placing it at the heart of the outcome document and by making specific commitments on ODA that will increase its volume *and* see an increasing proportion of this volume going to those countries that need it most for investment in meeting basic human rights such as education.

Anything less will be a failure.