ODUMUNC 2013
Issue Brief for the
Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Expanding Universal Primary Education

By: Garima Kaushal
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"Ten years ago, the world decided to reduce extreme poverty by half; to guarantee education for all children; to cut infant mortality by two thirds; to improve maternal health; to combat AIDS and malaria; and to promote gender equality.

That was 10 years ago. Considerable progress has been made, but we still have a very long road ahead of us. We have five years to meet our objectives".

-Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the Republic, at the MDG Summit of 20 September 2010

Introduction, Universal goals and local disputes: Better education is universally accepted as the basis for individual and national economic progress and development, maximizing individual freedom and choice, and promoting full integration of individuals into society and politics. Promotion of education is widely accepted—but not universally—although there are sharp disagreements about what education involves and what kind of assistance best encourages it. Educational programmes require careful oversight to be effective. They also can be highly controversial, potentially threatening conservative social order and delicate political systems. While most national leaders support greater access to education, there are sharp differences on the goals of education and how it should be promoted.

Basic education means literacy. The most accepted definition of "literacy rate" in the world is: any individual above the age of 15 can read and write. What exactly is the level of reading and writing required to be considered a literate? Is it just if one can write his/her name? Is it just if one can write the alphabets, sentences, or is it complete primary education? In the United States, an average 15 year old would normally be in 8th grade or a high school freshman. But there are so many countries with low literacy rate, such as India and Bangladesh, where the education level of an average 15 year old cannot be determined because of lack of primary education in the children.
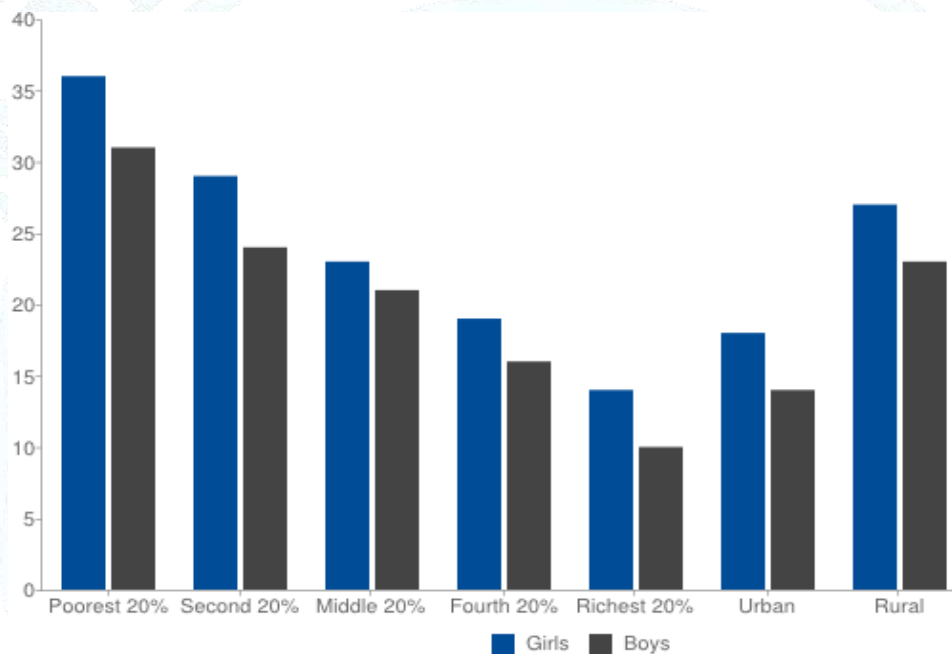
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Figure 1. Percentage of lower secondary-age children out of school
by sex, household wealth and location, 55 countries, 2005/2010

Source: UNDP (United Nations Development Program)

The chart above serves to be the latest description of the condition of universal primary education today. The most literate country of the world is Andorra. The main issue today is that the goal of achieving universal primary education by 2015 seems unachievable at this point. "In the developing regions, the net enrolment rate for children of primary school age rose from 82 to 90 per cent between 1999 and 2010. However, a closer look at the data reveals that nearly all of this growth occurred between 1999 and 2004, and that progress in reducing the number of out-of-school children slowed considerably after 2004."[1]

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[1] http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview/mdg_goals/mdg2/

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This shows how difficult it will be because the growth after the year 2004 has slowed. It is no hidden fact that the technology has improved by leaps and bounds in the past years. While the scope of the primary education should have been improving along with the new ways of getting the necessary education to children, the results have not been as expected. Children in the under-privileged areas of the world still lack basic education. No doubt, compared to two decades before, the education level has increased, but there is a lot of difference between improvement and meeting the expectations of other countries. One other thing is also very important: the countries with lower literacy rates and less primary education levels will not be able to achieve the desired goals by themselves, and they will need external help.

Figure 2. Children out of school, 1999-2015
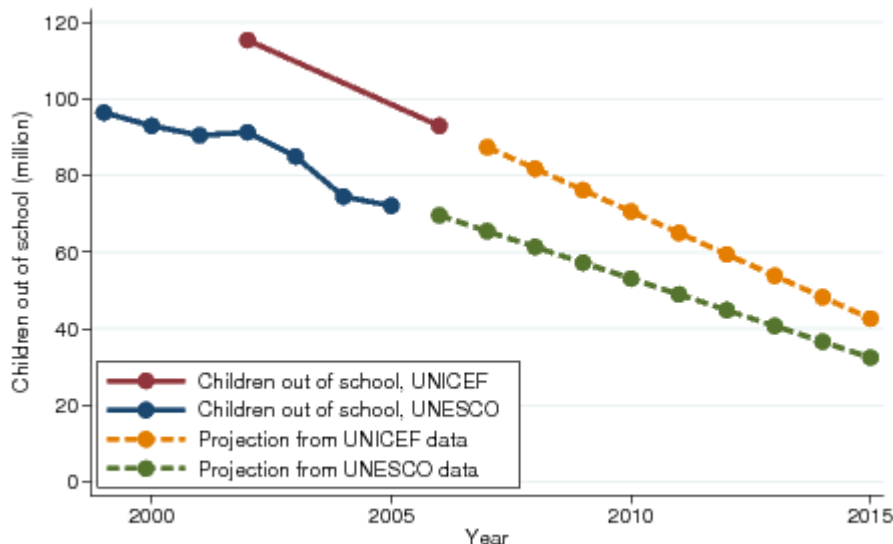
Friedrich Huebler, huebler.blogspot.com, January 2008

Sources: UIS (2005), UNESCO (2007), UNICEF (2007).

What is Universal Primary Education? According to the UN's Millennium Development Goals, the second goal of achieving Universal Primary Education is described as "children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling". Also, according to the same source, even after many countries have achieved great heights, the goal is still unachievable. Expanding universal primary education is a big issue, but where do we stand

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now, and what has the UN done in the past to achieve the goal? According to the UN, "enrollment in primary education has continued to rise, reaching 89 per cent in the developing world in 2008. Between 1999 and 2008, enrolment increased by 18 percentage points in sub-Saharan Africa, and by 11 and 8 percentage points in Southern Asia and Northern Africa, respectively. But the pace of progress is insufficient to ensure that, by 2015, all girls and boys complete a full course of primary schooling.

To achieve the goal by the target date, all children at official entry age for primary schooling would have had to be attending classes by 2009. Instead, in half of the sub-Saharan African countries with available data, at least one in four children of enrolment age was not attending school in 2008. About 69 million school-age children were not going to school in 2008, down from 106 million children in 1999. Almost three-quarters of children out of school are in sub-Saharan Africa (31 million) or Southern Asia (18 million)."[2]

The Universal Primary Education Rate is being brought down by the areas of the world that are lacking such education. If these areas were not taken into consideration, the rate would significantly rise. It is unfortunate that the most populated areas are the ones that are having trouble bringing up the rates, such as India. Another factor preventing improvement in education is poverty. It is no coincidence that literacy rates are lower in the areas with high poverty rates, because people cannot afford education. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to an education."

Education is still a distant dream for many. Some 113 million children are not able to attend primary school. 264 million children who might be attending secondary schools (the equivalent of high schools) do not. Around one billion adults lack one of the most basic skills taught in schools--literacy."[3] Some other millennium development goals have already been met, and now it is time to take bolder steps to achieve universal primary education. If not by 2015, it can be achieved by 2017. According to the same source,

> "Literacy helps communication and reasoning skills in children. And most importantly, education can help children from impoverished families break out of poverty. For every

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[2] http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG_FS_2_EN.pdf

[3] http://library.thinkquest.org/05aug/00282/edu_poverty.htm

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year of schooling children have, their salary as an adult will increase by an average of 10%- whether they are a girl OR a boy."

But, the resource that is extremely important for this to be possible is money. With better financial support, countries can better afford education for impoverished children, and, eventually those children can help move their families out of poverty.

Figure 3: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in primary education, 1970-2009
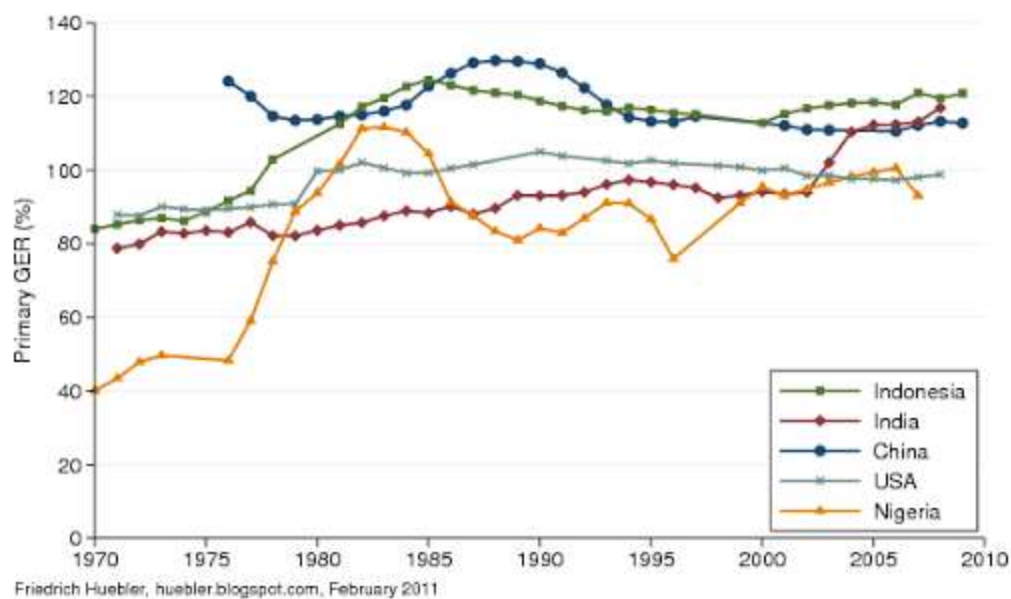
Source: UIS Data Centre, February 2011

What has been done? As one of the largest funders of education related programs, The World Bank has donated over $33 billion to education-related projects. Education for All (a global partnership launched in 1990 in Thailand), serves as a good example of more global partnerships who are connecting The World Bank to UNESCO, to spread more education everywhere, its focus being the developing countries.[4]

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[4] http://library.thinkquest.org/05aug/00282/edu_poverty.htm

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Major countries and voting blocs: For many major donors, education aid is structured through the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs). The MDG process helps establish goals for national planning and priorities for foreign assistance. Regarding the United States, the Millennium Challenge Corporation is working hard to meet the Millennium goals set by the UN:

> MCC's mandate to reduce poverty through economic growth underpins progress on all of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Only with sustained increases in income can families overcome poverty and meet their basic needs in terms of: health, education, and equal opportunity for women and girls. MCC's emphasis on good governance, country ownership, and accountability for results lays the groundwork for sustainable development progress well beyond the MDG's 2015 goals.[5]

> MCC works only with countries that have a track record of ruling justly, promoting economic freedom, and investing in people. These are essential ingredients for economic growth to occur, for development assistance to be effective, and for progress to be sustainable. By selecting country partners who perform well in these areas and leveraging continued domestic policy reform to support growth, good governance, and an enabling environment for trade and investment, MCC creates an incentive for them to improve performance on the MDGs, including in areas such as: girls' primary school completion rates, immunization rates, incidence of child mortality, access to water and sanitation, and natural resource management.[6]

Many countries struggle to find educational resources. While literacy can be achieved cheaply, more advanced education is highly capital-intensive. The scale of resources needed to meet these goals is illustrated by the United Kingdom, where, as of 2009, over 31 percent of per capita GDP (Gross Domestic Product) was given to education.[7]

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[5] http://www.mcc.gov/pages/activities/activity/mdgs

[6] http://www.mcc.gov/pages/activities/activity/mdgs

[7] http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=united+kingdom&d=UNESCO&f=series%3aXUNIT_GDPCAP_23_FSGOV%3bref_area%3aGBR

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Russia fully accepts the MDGs in its domestic planning and foreign assistance. But Russia stresses that education is a domestic issue, and each country is its own ultimate sovereign authority, with unique sovereign responsibility and freedom from foreign interference. Russian national goals include:

- Involve vulnerable groups of the population in education and socialization.
- Ensure participation in pre-school education of children from low-income families and children residing in rural areas.
- Reduce the gap in funding and access to general secondary and primary vocational education between and within regions.
- Update the content of general secondary education towards developing practical skills and application of knowledge.
- Improve compliance of vocational education with the modern economic environment and labor market requirements.[8]

Like Russia, many **Non-Aligned Movement countries** and other major donors including China are suspicious of UN efforts to promote education that can be used to promote democratic values or criticism of the state and government. Non-Aligned Movement countries prefer assistance programs that grant support to governments, but give recipient governments complete control over the use of those resources.

Many **Western and Asian donor countries**, by contrast, including Australia, Canada, European Union, Japan and the United States believe education should be used to promote specific universal values. They also prefer to reduce the role of host country governments in the oversight of those programmes, concerned that goals can be altered, or funds can be misdirected beyond oversight or for corrupt purposes.

Most major donors prefer to administer educational assistance directly with international or local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) who are responsible for final distribution, sensitive to local needs, and highly auditable. Host country governments are often uncomfortable with this preference and seek greater control to insure donor support is used in ways consistent with their own national priorities. This tension often leaves NGOs in the

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[8] http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/national/europethecis/russia/Russia_NHDR_2010_EN.pdf

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awkward position of negotiating between donors and host governments for access and freedom of action.

An example of Western preferences is **France**, which takes a 'sector based approach' for improving aid efficiency, that will enable a global view of the educational system (economic, financial, organizational, pedagogical) and will promote the establishment of "links between diagnosis, strategy, action plans, budget deployment programmes and results monitoring"[9] French policy is based on:

- Promotion of access to education. Problems of access must be addressed in terms of equity and of reducing in disparities in access with regards to certain vulnerable or remote populations. For this question, through its initiatives relative to educational offer and demand, France will pay special attention to the schooling of girls (access to schooling over the long term).

- Improve the quality of education. Providing access to schooling is not sufficient, the quality of teaching must be good. The identification of factors which influence learning and optimization of such factors is essential: use of manuals, training teachers, curriculum reforms, and teaching in national languages. France also funds programmes that stress French as a teaching language.

- Supporting the development of sector based policies. Improvement in the efficacy of educational systems is a prerequisite for their extension and overall efficiency, the alternative being deploying ever greater resources with proportionately diminishing returns. Here, three key directions have been retained: support for diagnostics and sector based analysis (notably through use of the RESEN methodology) in order to develop and deploy education policies; capacity building for the analysis, project management and running of systems to improve the use of resources deployed and improve the internal efficiency of the schooling systems; development support for deconcentrated and/or decentralised control of education systems.

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[9] http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/global-issues/development-assistance/institutions-and-issues-of/international-stakes/millennium-development-goals-mdg/article/achieve-universal-primary-school

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- Support the deployment of participative management of schools with development of greater levels of responsibility and synergy with local actors in the education community (parents and their associations, representatives of local authorities, teachers) in the expression of the education offer and demand and the management, follow up and evaluation of the primary education system."[10]

China, as of their 2010 report, has already achieved the second goal, with "the primary net school enrolment rate had reached 99.4 percent (99.36 percent and 99.44 percent for boys and girls respectively). The five-year retention rate of primary schools increased from 95 percent in 2000 to 99.3 percent in 2009. With the retention rates for boys and girls standing at 99.4 percent and 99.3percent respectively, gender disparities appear to have been eliminated, at least in this regard. In 2009, the gross enrolment rate in junior secondary education reached 99percent, while the coverage of nine year compulsory education was 99.3 percent for the country as a whole. Nine-year compulsory education has already been realized in 25 Chinese provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, and will be fully universalized across all Chinese provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities by 2015. China aims to increase the nine-year compulsory education retention rate from 90.8 percent in 2009 to 95 percent by 2020."[11]

What is being done now? A lot of organizations and NGO's are helping with this cause, to expand the education now, so the goal can be met. Some of these are: UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, Child Aid, Oxfam International, Save the Children, Peace Corps, Building Tomorrow, Fast Track Initiative, Right to Education Project, and one of the most important ones, the Global Campaign for Education. The Right to Education Project used the 4 A's to get help the cause, availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability. "The Right to Education Project conducts research, builds capacity, develops resources for advocacy, and collaborates with a wide network of human rights and education practitioners."[12]

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[10] http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/global-issues/development-assistance/institutions-and-issues-of/international-stakes/millennium-development-goals-mdg/article/achieve-universal-primary-school

[11] http://www.un.org.cn/public/resource/China_MDG_Progress_report_2010_e.pdf

[12] http://www.right-to-education.org/

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The Global Campaign for Education's mission statement is: "The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) is a civil society movement that aims to end the global education crisis. Education is a basic human right, and our mission is to make sure that governments act now to deliver the right of everyone to a free, quality, public education."[13]

With all the help from NGOs and countries putting in their own efforts, Universal Primary Education had been expanded to some extent. This MDG goal number two might take some extra time, but with increased efforts, it will be achieved. All these proposals require reconciling tensions between donor and host governments, between donor attitudes and beliefs and recipient population attitudes and beliefs. Educational goals and programmes are a major source of disagreement between international and local authorities, between secular and religious leaders, between advocates of universal human rights and advocates or traditional social orders. The topic invites controversy and requires careful compromise if progress is to be made.

Resources:

http://www.mcc.gov/pages/activities/activity/mdgs

http://library.thinkquest.org/05aug/00282/edu_poverty.htm

http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview/mdg_goals/mdg2/

http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG_FS_2_EN.pdf

http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=united+kingdom&d=UNESCO&f=series%3aXUNIT_GDPCAP_23_FSGOV%3bref_area%3aGBR

http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/national/europethecis/russia/Russia_NHDR_2010_EN.pdf

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[13] http://www.campaignforeducation.org/en/about-us

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http://www.right-to-education.org/

http://www.campaignforeducation.org/en/about-us