



No Child Forgotten:
Education and Inequality
Post 2015

GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR
EDUCATION

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In 2000 the world forgot millions of children

A free primary education is a human right for every child. Yet it is a right that is still denied to millions of children, particularly the most disadvantaged.

In 2000, the world came together to agree the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This was a historic moment – goals were set covering many aspects of human development, from improving children’s health to cutting poverty – together they represented a global commitment to improving the life chances of the poorest people in our world. Education, through the targets set in MDG2 and MDG3, was central to this vision:

MDG 2 Target: Ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

MDG 3 Target: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

The last decade has seen millions of children’s lives transformed, partly because of the MDGs. Last year there were 50 million fewer children out of school than in 1999. While challenges remain, girls have made particular gains.¹ In 1990, there were sixteen countries where for every 100 boys in school there were fewer than 70 girls; in 2010 only Afghanistan fell below this bar.²

As 2015 approaches, world leaders, civil society, the private sector and others are coming together to renew our collective commitment to ending poverty and confronting global injustice. As they do so it is imperative that this time no child’s chance to learn is forgotten.

The truth is that the MDGs agreed in 2000 did too little to concentrate efforts on the poorest and most marginalized. Of the 61 million still out of school many are from the most disadvantaged groups; likewise, many of the 130 million children who reach the fourth year of school but who are still not learning even the basics will be from disadvantaged households.³ In short, there are still millions of forgotten children who have been left behind.

MDG3 focused on gender inequalities and did have an impact. But there was no incentive to focus on girls from the most deprived and marginalized groups and no incentive to focus on other disadvantaged groups. This has often led – perhaps inevitably – to governments and aid agencies targeting the easiest to reach, not the most disadvantaged children who are hardest to reach.

So while the current MDGs have helped achieve a lot, we must now face up to their limitations: they created little or no incentive to focus on inequalities. And where they did, with gender, major inequalities still remain. They also said nothing about the quality of education and learning. In 2015 we cannot make the same mistakes.



Tackling educational inequality will help meet the big challenges of our times

Education enables individuals to achieve their potential. It also helps nations and the world face up to some of the biggest challenges of our times.

Education helps reduce inequality

Ensuring equal educational opportunity is the most powerful driver of a fairer society and of reducing wider inequalities in society. In South Korea, high quality basic education helped ensure equitable economic growth. In the 1960s, '70s and '80s while the economy grew at an astonishing rate levels of income inequality stayed low. When the OECD assessed why this was the case they concluded that “education policy plays a key role in explaining Korea’s (low) income inequality”.⁴ Brazil has started to reduce high levels of inequality, in large part by delivering universal basic education.⁵ Reductions in high income inequalities from the late 1980s onwards followed a widening of educational opportunity.⁶

Education ensures future prosperity for individuals and countries

Every pound invested in a child’s education will, on average, be repaid 10-15 times over when that person contributes more to economic growth during their working life.⁷ And for countries as a whole, education is critical to future prosperity: an additional average year of schooling per child can boost gross domestic product (GDP) by 0.37 per cent annually.⁸ When learning outcomes are also substantially improved, the impact on annual GDP growth goes up to 2 percentage points.⁹

Education strengthens democracies and can help reduce susceptibility to conflict

Some well-educated societies are undemocratic, but on average more education results in stronger democratic systems. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, adults who had been to primary school are 1.5 times more likely to support democracy than those with no schooling. Those that completed secondary school are three times more likely.¹⁰ Research also suggests that the more educated a society, the less likely it is that a country will experience conflict and insecurity. The chance of an adolescent boy becoming involved in conflict can be cut by up to 20 per cent for each additional year they stay in school.¹¹

Education empowers women and girls, and reduces maternal and child mortality

Educated girls are likely to be healthier, to earn more and to marry and have children later. A girl who has completed her education is more likely to reinvest her knowledge and income into her family and community. For example, girls who stay in school for an extra four years will, on average, have one less child.¹² A child born to a mother who can read is 50 per cent more likely to survive past age five.¹³ And if all children in sub-Saharan Africa were born to mothers with some secondary education, the child mortality rate could see a dramatic fall with 1.8 million fewer deaths each year – a 41 per cent reduction.¹⁴



The children the MDGs left behind

If the power of education is to be realised, all children must be in school, receiving a quality education and learning. Yet despite a decade of progress, many groups have been left behind. Some are left outside the school gates, unable to receive the education that is their right. Others are left behind in the classroom, learning far less than they should due to poor quality schooling.

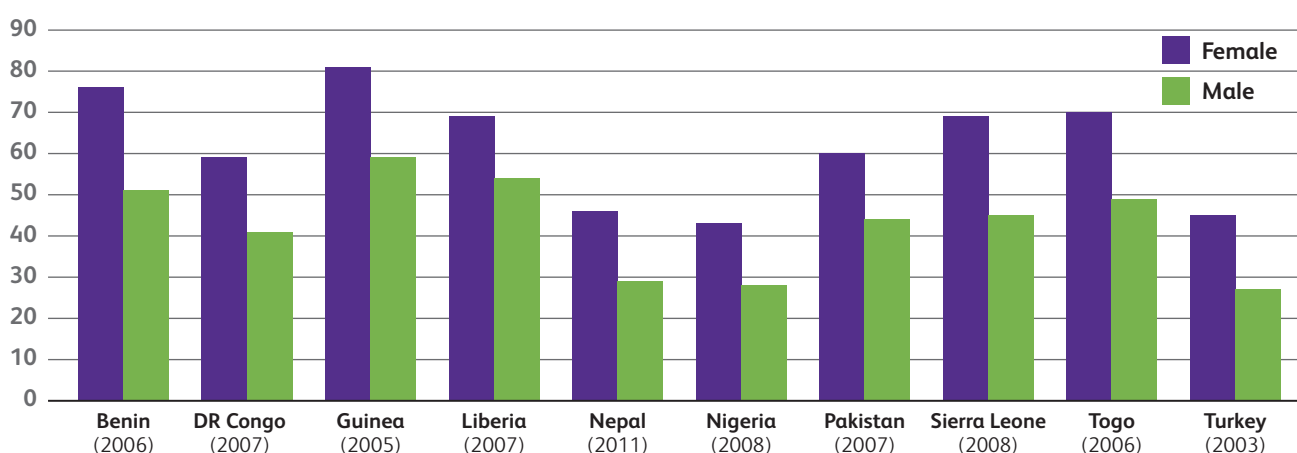
Children who suffer from multiple forms of discrimination and marginalisation are the least likely to have access to education. In Pakistan, for example, a poor rural girl is 16 times more likely to be out of school than a rich boy from a town or city.¹⁵

Girls

Despite gains, girls continue to be disadvantaged in many countries and regions. Sixty-eight countries have still not achieved gender parity in primary education, and girls are disadvantaged in sixty of them.¹⁶ Girls account for 65 per cent of children not in school in Western Asia and 79 per cent in Northern Africa.¹⁷ In Central and West Africa, only 8 girls complete primary school for every 10 boys.¹⁸ In many countries girls are also less likely to transition to secondary school, more likely to drop out and less likely to pass national examinations.^{19,20} As Chart 1 demonstrates they are often far less likely to complete lower secondary school than boys.

Furthermore, as a result of gender discrimination inside and outside school, girls are often at a disadvantage when they enter the classroom and are more likely to be negatively impacted by poor quality schooling, particularly in the poorest countries.²¹ This disadvantage can be compounded by a range of school-based factors, such as gender discrimination in the classroom, the curriculum and methods of learning and assessment, which can differentially impact on girls' and boys' learning.²²

Chart 1: Percentage of 15-24 year old girls and boys not completing lower-secondary school.



Source: UNESCO, World Inequality Database on Education, <http://www.education-inequalities.org/>



The poorest

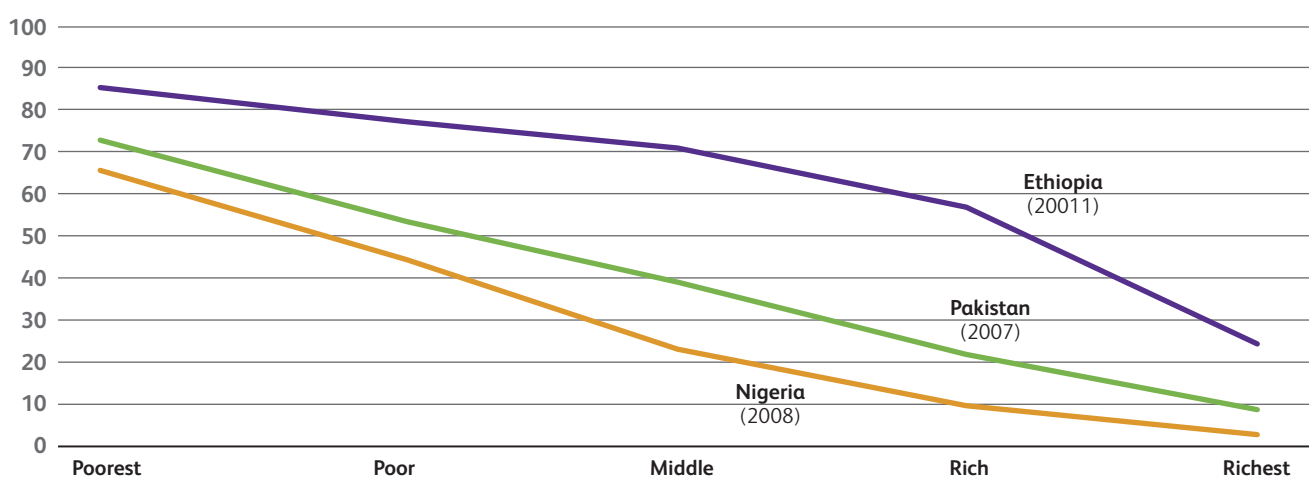
Children born into the poorest households are less likely to be in school and learn once there. This is especially the case in societies with already high levels of inequality. Globally, in the poorest fifth of households under two thirds (64 per cent) of all school aged children enrol in school, compared to 90 per cent of children from the richest families.²³ Poor children are also more likely to enrol in school late, attend infrequently, progress slowly and leave school early.²⁴

Take the cases of Nigeria, Pakistan and Ethiopia – three countries with a very large proportion of the world’s remaining out-of-school children. Chart 2 shows the significant inequalities between income groups in these three countries. In Nigeria, for example, in 2008 two thirds of the poorest 15-24 year olds had not completed primary school compared to only 3 per cent of the richest.

What is more, evidence suggests that in some countries inequalities have worsened. In Nigeria, the most recently available data shows that, on average, only half of all children will start and complete a primary education. This is a deterioration on 2003 levels, where nearly three quarters of children started and completed primary education.²⁵ The poorest children appear to have been particularly badly affected: their chances of both starting and completing primary school are shown to have fallen from 65 per cent in 2003 to just 34 per cent in 2008.²⁶

Failure to reduce such inequalities has significantly held back progress on achieving universal primary education.²⁷ Our research suggests that if the attendance rate for all Nigerian children²⁸ of primary school age rose to that of the wealthiest males, the number of out-of-school children of primary school age in 2008 would have been 5.1 million rather than 9.7 million.²⁹ In Pakistan the impact would be proportionately even larger: the number of out-of-school children of primary school age in 2007 would have been 2.5 million rather than 6.6 million.³⁰

Chart 2: Percentage of 15-24 year olds who failed to complete primary education in Nigeria, Pakistan and Ethiopia by wealth quintile.



Source: UNESCO, World Inequality Database on Education, <http://www.education-inequalities.org/>

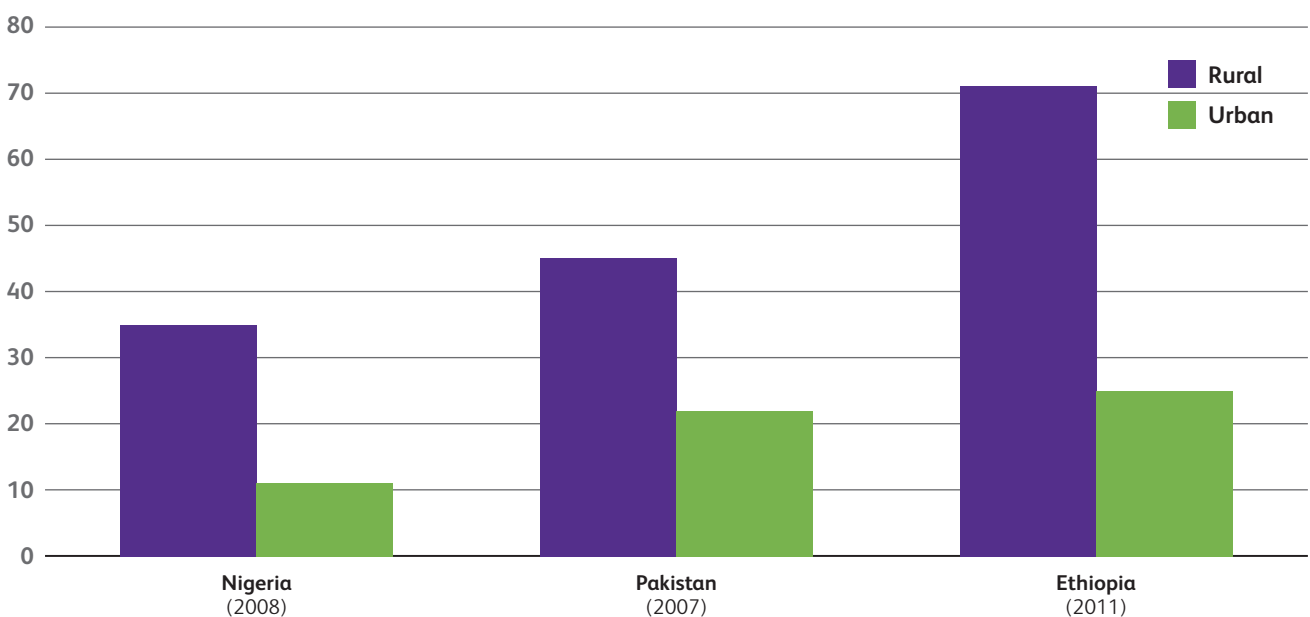


Living in disadvantaged areas

Where a child lives also affects whether or not they can access education and how well they do if in school. With urbanisation, the urban poor are a major and growing concern, particularly children living on the streets or in informal settlements. However, taken as a whole, children in rural areas have fallen far behind those in urban areas and are less likely to be enrolled in school.³¹ Girls living in rural areas are particularly disadvantaged.

Again using the examples of Pakistan, Nigeria and Ethiopia, Chart 3 shows just how wide the gaps continue to be. In Ethiopia, for example, 71 per cent of 15-24 year olds in rural areas did not complete primary education, compared with 25 per cent of those living in urban areas.

Chart 3: Percentage of 15-24 year olds not completing primary education in Nigeria, Pakistan and Ethiopia by location (urban/rural).



Source: UNESCO, World Inequality Database on Education, <http://www.education-inequalities.org/>

Photo: Zahid lives in a small village in northern Bangladesh. He had only reached class 3 when he had to drop out of school to help support his family. He now works as a waiter in a tea stall. © Arman Ali/Amar Odhikar Campaign. Supported by Oxfam Novib



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Children with disabilities

A lack of disability focus, or even mention, in the current MDGs has contributed to the comparative neglect of children with disabilities. Spending and policies have too often failed to reach these children, some of whom are the most in need of support. A disproportionately high number of disabled children are out of school – poor disabled children, whose families cannot help support them, fare worst.³²

Children with disabilities are often effectively invisible, especially in official education statistics. The lack of adequate health assessments for children in many countries means that many children with disabilities are never identified. However, being disabled more than doubles the chance of never enrolling in school in some countries.³³ Of all the excluding factors discussed in this paper, disability has the strongest correlation with poor educational outcomes.³⁴

According to the World Health Survey, 50.6 per cent of boys with disabilities completed primary school, compared with 61.3 per cent of those without. Similarly, only just over 4 in 10 girls with disabilities finished primary school compared with over 5 in 10 girls without disabilities.³⁵ Disabled children are more likely to learn less and be illiterate.³⁶

Ensuring disabled children are both in school and able to achieve their potential in the classroom is a critical challenge for post 2015 thinking on education. In general, a lack of resources, inflexible curricula, inaccessible materials, inadequate training and support for teachers and physical and attitudinal barriers are all still major obstacles. However, in order to measure progress there needs to be a significant investment in data collection, particularly in the area of disability.

Other disadvantaged groups

In many countries there are other groups that are systematically failed, with little opportunity to get into school, let alone learn the skills needed to get on in life.

Take child labourers: according to the International Labour Organization, there are 215 million 5-17-year-olds currently working. Numbers are falling very slowly and on current trends there will still be 170 to 190 million child labourers in 2020. Around 15 million primary school aged children, including 10 million in sub-Saharan Africa alone, are working rather than learning in school.³⁷

Or take the tens of millions of incredibly vulnerable street children; classic examples of ‘invisible children’ who are often forgotten. The numbers of street children only look set to increase as developing world cities rapidly expand.³⁸ Many such children are not even counted by official statistics, and little or nothing is being done to look after their educational needs.

In other countries children from particular ethnic, cultural or linguistic minority groups have been left behind. In Nigeria, for example, children from the Fulani ethnic group, a minority nomadic group, are nearly 8 times less likely to be in school than the Ekoi, a group from the south of the country.³⁹ In Kenya, children who happen to be born into ethnic groups in the arid north have significantly worse chances of entering and making progress in school – a matter made worse by a school funding system which gives less to each child in these areas.⁴⁰ Scandalously per-child spending in parts of the arid north is half that in the capital city, Nairobi.⁴¹



Post 2015 policies for leaving no child behind

Ensuring that no child is left behind, with all children in school and learning, will require significant changes in the international community's approach.

The MDGs' shortcomings must not be repeated and a new global development framework needs to create incentives to focus on forgotten groups: the poor, those in deprived areas, disabled children, girls and ethnic minorities. We discuss how this can be done in the final section. However, a global framework is only part of the story. It will also be critical that legislation and policy at both the global and the national levels focuses on reducing inequalities through education. Equitable school systems should have five key characteristics.

1. High quality teaching, with targeted support for the most marginalized

No school system can be better than its teachers. Yet, countries face enormous shortfalls in the number of qualified teachers: 1.7 million more are needed to achieve universal primary education by 2015.⁴² Where teachers are in post, far too few are adequately trained, paid and supported. And few countries have any strategy to get the best teachers in front of the neediest children, whether those in poor remote areas or children with disabilities, who often require specialist support.⁴³

2. Fair school funding systems with targeting of resources

Fair school funding requires funds in such a way as to ensure equitable outcomes for all children. Often the poorest and most disadvantaged will need more targeted funding and support, but this is often not the case. Kenya was cited in the previous section; in Rwanda too schools in better off areas have far larger budgets.⁴⁴ Educational fairness demands fairer funding in the future.

3. Quality pre-school provision for the poorest and most marginalised

Extensive evidence demonstrates children's life chances can be diminished even in their earliest years. If a child's brain is under-developed when they start school they start behind their peers and fall further behind.⁴⁵ Yet at present, access to pre-school care and learning is highly unequal with access up to ten times lower for the poorest compared with the best-off in many countries.⁴⁶ Tackling inequality will require that the poorest and most marginalised start school ready to learn.

4. Targeted poverty reduction linked to schooling

Poverty remains a barrier to getting into school for many as they struggle to meet the costs of education, or are forced to work or to enter into child marriage. Many countries, particularly in Latin America, have introduced social protection systems which link welfare payments for families to school attendance.⁴⁷ These approaches are now increasingly being developed in Africa as well.⁴⁸ The best policy response will differ from country to country, but poverty must not be a barrier to education.

5. Transparent information and data shining a light on inequalities

Ensuring a sustained focus on equity requires accessible public data on enrolment in school and learning, all broken down so the performance of different groups, including children with disabilities, can be compared. This should happen globally: UNESCO's new World Inequality Database on Education shows what is possible already on enrolment and completion.⁴⁹ Increasingly, international assessments, such as SACMEQ in Southern and Eastern Africa are being used to highlight low levels of learning, but improvements are needed if data is to be used to bring about change.^{50 51}

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A post 2015 framework for leaving no child behind

Currently 61 million children do not have the chance to go to school. Millions more are not receiving a good quality education.

They have been forgotten and left behind, and risk falling further behind. And because today's educational inequalities will translate into tomorrow's inequalities of income, wealth and power, it is critical that the post 2015 development framework has tackling educational inequality right at its core.

It may not be possible for a global framework to measure progress for each of the disadvantaged groups of children discussed in this report. In part this is because long lists of indicators will result in less focus and a less effective overall development framework. But it is also because many of the most invidious educational injustices will be particular to local circumstances. National governments will need to take ownership over defining and monitoring progress for the groups of children most marginalised in their societies.

However, it is possible, and indeed critical, for the world to focus on the most pervasive inequalities. We cannot make the same mistake as in 2000 and set global ambitions which have no incentive to focus on some of the most disadvantaged children. As the UN has said:

To the extent that accelerating progress towards some targets is easier when resources are concentrated among the better off, the era of the MDGs may have inadvertently seen some channelling of resources away from the poorest population groups or from those that are already at a disadvantage.⁵²

GCE UK believes that assessment mechanisms are needed to measure both inequalities of access to education and the quality of learning outcomes. This means that the post 2015 education goals should assess inequalities of access, transition and completion, but also learning outcomes. These inequalities should be measured for four main groups in a post 2015 framework. These are:

- Girls compared with boys
- Children from the poorest households compared with those from the best off households
- Children with disabilities compared with children without
- Children from urban areas compared with children from rural areas

So, for example, an overall goal could be set along the following lines:

By 2030, we will ensure that all children receive a good quality pre-primary, primary and secondary education.

But we must not make the same mistake of simply measuring the number of children who achieve any given measure of a quality education or learning. Instead inequalities between the four groups above must be measured, with other disadvantaged groups also included depending on the national context. It is only by doing this, by devising indicators with a robust focus on inequality, that this time around no child will be overlooked and unjustifiable inequality in education will be overcome.

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The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) is an international coalition of child rights' activists, teachers unions and development organisations united in their determination to make the right to education a reality. In the UK the campaign seeks to increase community awareness of the state of education internationally and generate the political will necessary to ensure the UK plays an active and effective part in efforts to secure education for all. For more information about the campaign in the UK visit www.sendmyfriend.org

The Campaign's UK members are:

ActionAid	NIACE
Action on Disability and Development	NUT
Association of Teachers and Lecturers	Oxfam GB
CAFOD	Plan UK
CAMFED	READ Foundation
Christian Aid	RESULTS UK
Consortium for Street Children	Save the Children UK
Comic Relief	Sense International
Deaf Child Worldwide	Sightsavers
Handicap International UK	Steve Sinnott Foundation
Leonard Cheshire Disability	Voluntary Service Overseas
NASUWT	War Child

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