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The role of education

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Panel discussion: The End of Foreign Aid as we know it: The Alleviation of Poverty in a Globalized Economy

The Role of Education

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The alleviation of poverty is a many faceted undertaking in which education plays an important role. Where early childhood learning opportunities are available, we see benefits beyond the obvious. This article will point out some of these primary, secondary and even tertiary benefits in a community and then point out the challenges to arriving at those. Finally we will look at some current known initiatives.

“Education is not a way to escape poverty; it is a way of fighting it.”¹ So said Julius Nyerere, former president of Tanzania. “During the World Education Forum held in Dakar in 2000 the international community underscored the need to eradicate extreme poverty and gave its collective commitment to work towards this aim through education. ... The role of education in poverty eradication ... is crucial. No country has succeeded if it has not educated its people. Not only is education important in reducing poverty, it is also a key to wealth creation.”²

In Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 the UN- sponsored Education for All (EFA) initiative was launched to bring the benefits of education to “every citizen in every society.”³ Partners comprised a broad coalition of national governments, civil society groups, and development agencies such as [UNESCO](#) and the World Bank. In response to slow progress over the

¹ <http://www.unesco.org/education/poverty/news.shtml> (accessed 4 August 2008)

² *Ibid.*

³ <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTEDUCATION/0,,contentMDK:20374062~menuPK:540090~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:282386,00.html> (accessed 01 August 2008)

decade, the commitment was reaffirmed in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000 and then again in September 2000, when 189 countries and their partners adopted two of the EFA goals among the eight [Millennium Development Goals \(MDGs\)](#).⁴

The Dakar Framework for Action 2000 underscored Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)⁵ as part of EFA which emphasized the necessity to start education at the pre-primary level, ages 3-5. It states clearly that many countries have come a long way in achieving many of the Dakar goals, but there is still a long way to go, with "115 million children who have never seen the inside of a classroom."⁶ "According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (IUS), 12% of school age children are likely never to attend school."⁷

Early childhood education is important, because the development of the brain occurs primarily and particularly rapidly in the early years.⁸ Cognitive skills, such as language, are said to double every year between 18 months and 6 years of age.⁹ Vocabulary development is a pivotal skill for success in learning later.¹⁰

Early childhood learning is meant to emphasize a child's holistic development – cognitive, emotional, social and physical skills.¹¹ Services for older children will be on literacy and numeracy.

"Education is a fulcrum for social and economic development. Among other things, it leads to greater personal freedom and empowerment, higher labor-

⁴ <http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/GMIS/gdmis.do?siteId=2&goalId=6&menuId=LNAV01GOAL2> (accessed 4 August 2008)

⁵ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf> p.58

⁶ George Ingram, Annababette Wils, Bidemi Carroll, and Felicity Townsend, "The Untapped Opportunity: How Public-private Partnerships can advance education for all," published by *AED Academy for Educational Development*. Foreword.

⁷ Ingram, p. 11

⁸ Early Childhood Care and Education in E-9 Countries, from UNESCO ED-2004/WS/5

⁹ Early Childhood Development in Bangladesh: A Policy Paper (Draft for review, 10 September '06)

¹⁰ Arthur J. Rolnick, Rob Grunewald, "Early Intervention on a Large Scale," *Education Week Magazine*, January 4, 2007. http://www.minneapolisfed.org/Research/studies/earlychild/early_intervention.cfm (accessed 07 August 2008)

¹¹ UNESCO ED-2004/WS/5

force participation, lower crude birth rates and child mortality, more democratic societies, greater equity and economic growth.”¹²

Of the many benefits of pre-primary education we can point to the obvious of the children performing better once they enter primary school. They will be less likely to have to repeat a grade or even drop out of school entirely. If both genders participate in pre-primary schools, equality in primary school is much more likely. Secondary benefits may be staying in school longer, having better chances of good health, finding work, higher earnings and social inclusions and a more informed and literate society, as well as a lowering of crime rates. Positive early life experiences have long term effect on adult social behavior, competence and economic growth and political stability. What may not be so obvious are the tertiary benefits which go to the mothers of the children enrolled in pre-primary schools. They can feel more secure in finding jobs while the children are safe at school. Furthermore, many studies have shown that the higher the literacy rates among girls/women are, the lower the fertility rates and the better the health of the women become.¹³

But implementing these initiatives takes money. It was estimated that the cost of putting 85% of the world's children in a good quality primary school by year 2015 (EFA's goal) will be \$7-17 billion/year.¹⁴ Importantly, ECCE should be supported as a primary source for achieving EFA. If all children do not have access to ECCE, then the primary grades, as indicated above, will see more dropouts and repeats in primary and secondary grades and ultimately not have the desired effect on EFA. Later conferences began focusing on the quality imperative, i.e. teachers and classroom processes now being front and center as the key to education quality.¹⁵

¹² Ruth Kagia, "Quality Education for All Young People: Challenges, Trends and Priorities," *Prospects*, Vol. XXXV, No. 1, March 2005, p. 6.

¹³ Early Childhood Care and Education in E-9 Countries, from UNESCO ED-2004/WS/5; Caroline Pontefract and Frank Hardman "The discourse of classroom interaction in Kenyan primary schools", *Comparative Education*, Vol. 41, No. 1, February 2005, pp. 87-106; Maurice Boissiere, "Determinants of Primary Education Outcomes in Developing Countries: Background Paper for the Evaluation of the World Bank's Support for Primary Education," The World Bank Operations Evaluation Department (OED), 2004; Rolnick and Grunewald.

¹⁴ Nancy Birdsall, Ruth Levine & Amina Ibrahim, "Towards Universal Primary Education: investments, incentives, and institutions", *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2005, pp. 337-349. P. 343

¹⁵ ECCE in E-9, UNESCO ED2004/WS/5

Currently we are seeing approximately 32% of the E-9 countries' children enrolled in pre-primary schools. At the high end are Mexico and Brazil, and at the low end Egypt.¹⁶ E-9 countries are: Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan. "Mandatory funding, or some form of obligatory investment in ECCE, seems inevitable. Otherwise, the starting point of lifelong learning is not likely to be on the government's priority investment list. Countries that have achieved universal primary education, for example, do not turn to ECCE as their logical next goal. They tend to move on to secondary, adult and higher education, despite a plethora of studies proving that investment in ECCE reaps great social, education and economic returns."¹⁷ It has been estimated that at the low end, for every \$ spent on ECCE, there is \$4 in benefits – after health care, this is one of the highest multipliers measured. In some cases, the multiplier has been measured to be 17.¹⁸

We also need to remind ourselves that today's children will be productive in a decade, and the better educated they become the higher the country's productivity and growth prospects will be in this global economy.

Apart from the challenge of money, the biggest challenge is to find teachers – qualified, capable, willing and trained. The 2004 UNESCO report emphasizes that "teachers have the strongest influence on learning and on a wide variety of other quality factors within schools".¹⁹ The teacher shortage is particularly acute in Africa.²⁰ In order to achieve universal primary education, "Sub-Saharan Africa needs to recruit 1,361,000 new teachers between 2000-2015 – critical issue is how to ensure that the supply is of the quality desired".²¹ Because businesses benefit from a well-educated workforce, it is in their best interest to contribute to buildings, books and other materials, as well to training of teachers and development of

¹⁶ ECCE in E-9, UNESCO ED2004/WS/5

¹⁷ ECCE in E-9 p. 50

¹⁸ Robert G. Lynch, "What Science Tells us About Pre-K in the States", presentation made on Dec. 8, 2007 at The Cost Effectiveness of Public Investment in High-Quality Prekindergarten: A State Level Synthesis.

¹⁹ UNESCO 2004, pp.18, 161-168

²⁰ Ingram

²¹ Elizabeth Leu, "The Role of Teachers, Schools and Communities in Quality Education: A Review of the Literature", AED Global Education Center, Academy for Educational Development 2006/#1, p. 2-3

curricula.²² Local conditions must be factored into the design of learning materials.²³ “In addition to classrooms, adequate sanitation in terms of water and latrines is an important aspect of school facilities for increasing the willingness of parents to enroll their girls.”²⁴ The UNESCO 2004 Report also points out that “teachers is the largest public expenditure in budgets of less-developed countries” and this is exacerbated by exploding enrollments and the need to improve the quality of teachers already in place.

One additional challenge for access by the poor to primary education is government policy and commitment. Government policy in developing countries can have a larger impact on primary education access and outcomes than would be the case in developed countries. Because education, its ramifications and infrastructure may fall within different governmental departments cooperation among and between these departments or ministries is vital. It is essential, because education is part of a poverty reduction strategy, and it is a way of removing poverty at its roots. One way many analysts consider to increase school participation of the poor is to reduce the cost of school, perhaps by subsidizing attendance.²⁵

In some countries the language in which teaching is conducted in pre-primary classes has also caused some difficulty. Research shows that young children do better at mastering concepts of reading and notions of numbers, shapes, and arithmetic in the language spoken in their homes. Some developing countries use the colonial language as the main language for instruction.²⁶

Before mentioning current initiatives it is helpful to remind ourselves of special gender challenges. Statistics indicate that 75% of the world’s illiterate adults are women.²⁷ “Social benefits derive from educating girls

²² Ingram, Boissiere

²³ Leu, p.15

²⁴ Maurice Boissiere, “Determinants of Primary Education Outcomes in Developing Countries: Background Paper for the Evaluation of the World Bank’s Support for Primary Education,” The World Bank Operations Evaluation Department (OED), 2004, p. 17

²⁵ Boissiere

²⁶ Boissiere

²⁷ <http://www.opportunity.org/NETCOMMUNITY/Page.aspx?pid=409&srcid=325> (accessed 4 August 2008)

and women, including; (i) lower fertility rates; (ii) lower infant mortality rates; (iii) improved nutrition; (iv) increased life expectancy; and (v) better opportunities for children in the next generation.”²⁸ “In situations of extreme poverty, girls are particularly at risk as they tend to inherit the poverty of their mothers. They are prone to abuse of all forms, and very often confined to households in which they are virtual slaves. ... Other groups of poor children who merit special attention are children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, street children and children of some ethnic minorities.”²⁹

"The world is starting to grasp that there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women and girls," Mr. Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General, said addressing the Commission on the Status of Women. "Study after study has taught us that no other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity, or to reduce infant and maternal mortality.”³⁰

It is encouraging to discover many initiatives underway to achieve ECCE and ultimately the goal of EFA in 2015. Let us point to a few.

In Bangladesh UNESCO has provided Hiramon Resource boxes. The programme is tailor-made to the needs of the borrowers, as they decide what is it they want to know. It covers shop-keeping, goal-setting, health and other areas. A resource centre supports the programme and provide a mobile resource box "The Hiramon", which is transported by a rickshaw. It was named after the Bengali mythical bird that flew from place to place giving advice. The Hiramon takes materials (posters, games, puzzles, folk tales), and videos to the villages. A battery powers the first one, but a new one will be constructed which will utilize solar panels. The women themselves are responsible for the care and up-keep of the resource centres and the Hiramon. The exposure to knowledge has stimulated the women to want to be literate and numerate.³¹

Also in Bangladesh, the Grameen Bank as part of its 16 decisions states: "No. 7 – We shall educate our children and ensure that they can earn to pay

²⁸ Leu, pp. 29-30

²⁹ International Workshop on Education and Poverty Eradication, Kampala, Uganda, 30 July to 3 August 2001.

³⁰ <http://www.bpwnz.org.nz/CircularFebruary2007.pdf>, p.1

³¹ <http://www.unesco.org/education/poverty/hiramon/shtml> (accessed 4 August 2008)

for their education.”³² The Grameen Bank has specifically established the Grameen Shikkha/Education. This is a company in the family of Grameen companies. Established in 1997 its main objectives are to promote mass education in rural areas, provide financial support in the form of loans and grants for the purpose of education, use IT for alleviation of illiteracy and development of education, promote new technologies and innovate ideas and methods for development of education etc. Grameen Shikkha has been conducting Life Oriented Education Program, Pre-school/Child Development Program, Early Childhood Development Program and Arsenic Mitigation Program in various districts of Bangladesh.³³

In 2007 Opportunity International³⁴, one of the world’s largest and oldest micro-finance organizations, launched Microschools of Opportunity™³⁵. Microfinance involves loans, savings and insurance, and in the case of the Microschools, the loans go to teachers, and they become edupreneurs. These edupreneurs will open schools for poor children with no other means to get an education. Even during its very brief existence Microschools’ children outperform public counterparts in India, China and Africa – Kenya and Ghana.

Based on an initiative by an American Greg Mortensen, Central Asia Institute was established. It “is a 501(c)3 (US) non-profit organization with the mission to promote and support community-based education, especially for girls, in remote regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan.”³⁶ So far 76 schools have been built. Mr. Mortensen spent some time in the region and found that the African proverb “you educate a boy, you educate an individual; you educate a girl, you educate a nation”³⁷ was a basis for assisting in the building of schools for girls only. They were not otherwise afforded the opportunity to learn in the poor and remote areas of these countries.

³²

http://www.grameen.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=22&Itemid=109&limit=1&limitstart=6 (accessed 4 August 2008)

³³ <http://www.grameencommunications.com/gfamily.html> (accessed 4 August 2008)

³⁴ <http://www.opportunity.org>

³⁵ <http://www.opportunity.org/NETCOMMUNITY/Page.aspx?pid=409&srcid=325>

³⁶ <http://www.ikat.org/>

³⁷ This well-known saying is attributed to the Ghanaian scholar Dr. James Emmanuel Kwegyir-Aggrey (1875-1927), one of this century's greatest educators.

“The Spark Group is a group of student entrepreneurs from MIT who want to invest in Indian edupreneurs serving poor communities to ensure that the next generation receives quality education.”³⁸

The Seva Sadan Society was set up in Mumbai, India and runs a pre-primary school with no government aid or grant. The children are underprivileged girls and mostly from single women.³⁹

For many ideas of school opportunities, edupreneurs and new initiatives in India, visit this website

<http://www.nextbillion.net/blogs/topic/education?page=3> (accessed 5 August 2008).

We end with this observation by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen: “If you want to build a country, build a school.”

³⁸ <http://thesparkgroup.wordpress.com/?s=edupreneurs> (accessed 5 August 2008)

³⁹ <http://www.sevasadan.org/activities/preprimary.asp> (accessed 5 August 2008)