

Education for All

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In the 1930's my paternal grandfather was a teacher in Java, the main island of what was then the Dutch Indies. When, during that time of economic crisis depression, the government enacted deep cuts in the education budget for the local population but not for the Dutch children, he campaigned publicly against them – resulting in the Dutch authorities banishing him to a job in one of the “hardship” outer islands.

With such DNA, of course, Education for All has always been my favorite development objective. My grandfather's motivation was that literacy is essential to live a life in human dignity. As one woman in a poor Indian village, said to me once, “learning to read was as if a light in my head was finally switched on.” But education doesn't only transform the individual's future life: it transforms the future lives of nations.

Nowadays we know investment in human capital is essential for development; investing in basic education is one of the best ways of reducing poverty. Illiteracy is at the root of poverty. The best way to empower the poorest is to give them access to education. The evidence is overwhelming that education drives economic and social progress. An educated labor force is essential for economic development; and it improves not just individual incomes and economic growth, but also child and maternal health, and resistance to diseases.

In Uganda, farmers who have had four years of primary education produce seven percent more than those who have had no education. If a Zambian mother completes her primary education, her children have a 25 percent better chance of surviving. Indeed, particularly girls' education has tremendous pay-offs: sending girls to school is the best investment to ensure her future family will be literate and healthy. In the early 90ies, Larry Summers, at the time Chief Economist at the World Bank, told the Pakistan Government that the best investment in their country would be educating their girls. If only they had followed that advice...

As early as 1948, the Right to Education was codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But the numbers of kids out of school continued to grow. In 1990 an international conference in Jomtien, Thailand, for the first time agreed to the Goal of Education for All by 2015, which was reaffirmed at the 2000 conference in Dakar, where rich countries promised that *“no country seriously committed to Education for All would be thwarted in their achievement of this goal for lack of resources.”* As a Development Minister at the time, I followed through on this and brought together some dedicated African Education Ministers, the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, the Global Campaign for Education and the relevant bilateral donors to give meaning to this commitment, for a meeting in Amsterdam in 2001. This led to the Education for All – Fast Track Initiative, which allows donors to put their money in well-prepared and vetted primary education programs of poor countries. The fact that this Initiative has been permanently

underfunded is a constant reminder that rich countries' present aid flows are insufficient and not spent well...

However, real action was spurred, when Education for All became one of the eight Millennium Development Goals. All the world's leaders – from rich and poor countries - came together at the UN's Millennium General Assembly in September 2000 to sign the Millennium Declaration., committing themselves to - let me quote - *'free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected'*. They adopted the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (Goal 1); achieve Education for All (Goal 2); eliminate gender inequality (Goal 3); ensure healthcare to radically reduce child mortality (Goal 4), maternal mortality (Goal 5) and diseases as HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis (Goal 6); provide safe water and sanitation and prevent environmental degradation (Goal 7), all by 2015. (The eighth Goal is about what *rich* countries promised to contribute to these Goals: I'll talk about that later).

As a package, the Millennium Goals call for a coherent integrated approach. Given the synergy, it is impossible to achieve any single Goal in isolation. They are all inter-related: progress on one fosters progress on others, while stagnation in one can hold back improvements on others.

Obviously, education is essential to achieve the first, the Poverty Goal, as is for the third, the Gender Goal. And education is also crucial for the Health Goals: literacy is needed both for prevention campaigns to be effective and for patients to understand treatment; girls who have completed their schooling are far less likely to contract HIV.

But, one cannot achieve progress in Education for All without progress on all the other Millennium Goals. Without progress on the Poverty Goal, even if primary education is available, and free, it has a cost: be it uniforms or pencils or just the absence for household chores. Extremely poor families often need their children's' paid or unpaid labor to survive; and poor nutrition impairs the ability to learn.

Mothers often want their kids to go to school, but without progress on the third Goal, they might not have much say in the matter. And without progress on the Health Goals availability of education is not enough, not just because sick kids don't go to or learn less at school, but also, because if the mother is ill or dies, her daughters will be kept home to run the household. And dealing with the AIDS pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa is essential: the 12 million AIDS orphans have even less chance to go to school, while in some Southern African countries teachers are dying faster of AIDS than the rate in which governments can recruit and train new ones. And on the 7th Goal: to get girls to go to school, lack of clean water near their homes is in many rural area's the biggest obstacle, as they have to walk the many miles to fetch it for the family.

So please, do not campaign for just more money for education: if that results in less money for these other goals – within an overall shrinking or stagnating aid envelop: what is the point?

Since their inception, the MDGs have had a catalytic effect on global development, because of their simplicity, measurability and accessibility. Anybody can understand them, grasp that they matter, judge whether or not his or her country and the wider world is doing enough to achieve them and take action if they are not.

Progress across a large number of countries and indicators has been the result. According to the UN *Millennium Development Goals Report 2010*, despite significant setbacks, due to the 2008-2009 economic downturn, the developing world as a whole remains on track to achieve the poverty reduction target by 2015. It is estimated that the developing world as a whole has already achieved the MDG target of halting and reversing the incidence of tuberculosis and will meet or even exceed the MDG drinking water target by 2015. Remarkable improvements in key interventions - for malaria and HIV control, and measles immunization, for example - have cut child deaths with a third.

And, regarding education: in my first public speeches on these issues, 30 some years ago, I talked about the more than 150 million kids out of school. Statistics are dated, but we know that, despite an overall increase in the number of children in this age group, this number started falling over the last decade, to less than half: 73 million in 2006. In fact, in almost all regions, the net enrolment ratio in 2006 exceeded 90 per cent, and many countries are close to achieving universal primary enrolment. In India, the country with the largest number of illiterate people, the enrollment rate now passes the 96%. Sub-Sahara Africa is still lagging, but is also the region with the largest advances. Now, of course this is not enough to achieve the goal, and the goal of just enrollment is quite modest: do kids complete their education? Do they learn enough? Do they learn relevant stuff, and can we deal with the remaining gender gap in primary education? – I am sure these issues will come up this afternoon.

But let's also for a moment celebrate the success stories and realize that these underscore that much can be accomplished with the political will of governments andwith adequate support. And let me now focus on that last part, as indeed insufficient progress on several Goals, particularly in some of the poorest countries is in good part because developed countries have fallen short of providing the proper amounts and quality of aid. Which brings me to Goal 8.

Of course achieving these Goals is the primary responsibility of developing countries. But in Goal 8 rich countries acknowledged that unless rich countries played their part, poor countries would not be able to achieve them. Given the interlinkages between the Goals, the issue was not and should not be how much money donors pledge for individual Goals, but the size of the total envelop available for development aid: 0.7 % of donors National Income. What is the point of spending more on education as long as the need to fetch water keeps girls from going to school, or teachers continue to be lost to AIDS? The other issue is if aid is *delivered* effectively to help countries achieve these Goals.

The Millennium Declaration spurred lofty pledges to increase aid (G 8 Gleneagles and the Luxembourg EU Summit in 2005) and its effectiveness, (Paris 2005 and Accra 2008) with action plans, indicators and target dates.

Alas, these commitments have not been translated in most rich countries' budgets and aid administrations. As a result, the lack of adequate and effective international financing has been an important constraint in achieving the Goals, and much of the blame for failure to achieve the Goals should fall on the rich countries. The Education for All – Fast Track Initiative continues to prove this point:

The gap this year between aid committed at the G8 Gleneagles Summit 5 years ago and actual aid given is some \$ 17.5 billion and Germany can be blamed for a significant part of the gap – and that share will be increasing in the coming years as the German budget for ODA stagnates. German ODA fell to 0.35% of GNI in 2009, the lowest in three years, and as no substantial increases are budgeted for ODA, Germany will clearly fail to meet the EU target of 0.51% ODA/GNI target this year; and, without any time frame of annual planned increases up to 2015, the 0.7% in 2015. In the meantime, other countries such as Spain and the UK, despite being hit harder by the crisis have maintained sharp aid increases in line with their commitments. As Europe's largest and most responsible country, and the first to rebound from the crisis, one would not expect Germany to rank well below the EU-15 average, with only Austria, Italy, Greece and Portugal doing worse: that is not where Germany belongs. The more as e.g. Spain and the U.K. – far worse hit by the crisis – continue to increase aid and live up to their commitment to achieve the 0.7%.

The same goes for the promises to make aid more effective: The OECD uses a benchmark to capture the quality of aid for individual donors, measuring aid levels in terms of country programmable aid (CPA). This is aid that remains after deducting all “aid” spent in donor countries themselves, which is unpredictable and cannot be programmed by recipients to support their development plans. CPA is the part of ODA that can genuinely be spent by poor countries for their programs to achieve the MDG's. According to OECD's calculations, this type of aid represents not even half (46.8 %) of gross 2005 bilateral ODA. CPA represented only 30% of German gross ODA in 2005 – well below the OECD average. Thus, for Germany, there is space to triple, as Americans say, the “bang for the buck” – even with the present amount of “bucks.”

So the question is not just what a donor spends on education, but where that money goes: just trace your development budget and see how much actually goes to fund poor countries' primary education, to allow them to finance training of teachers and paying teachers' salaries (very little), and how much goes to German consultants or is in fact subsidy to your OWN education system, as it funds things like courses and scholarships for developing countries' students who come to German universities. And even if spent on primary education: how effective is it? Because too long each donor wanted to build their own little school – with a plaque referring to the solidarity of the Italian or French people – a nice photo opportunity for the traveling Development Minister, without much thought, once the school was build, of who was going to pay the future teacher salary and learning material. We have to stop building “our” German or Swedish schools and start supporting “their” (= the developing countries) education policies: aid only works if it supports local plans and priorities.

Germany's Development Minister talks a lot about the need of aid to be efficient: who would disagree? And in fact the international donor community has agreed some 5 years ago on action plans, with progress indicators and time lines: we would certainly welcome acceleration of Germany's implementation of these commitments. Particularly regarding Education: Indeed children can't wait: The sooner the better.

Let me conclude with another little story. A decade ago, as a Minister I was visiting Dutch schools in the launch of the campaign for "Education for all by 2015" when a 8 year old girl raised her hand after my speech and asked ' "Madame Minister: why wait until 2015, why not NOW???"

By now, indeed, since that question, we lost another generation of millions who never saw the inside of a classroom, adding to the numbers of today's illiterate adults...

Indeed: Why not now?

The one and only question in my career I did not have a ready answer for.

And still I wouldn't know how to answer when my granddaughters would ask me the same question in a few years...