



Africa Regional Office / Bureau Régional Afrique

## Africa Network Campaign on Education For All

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### **Challenges to achieving Education For All in Africa**

Five years have passed since Dakar and there is still growing concern that 2015 targets will be missed unless urgent measures are taken by governments and donors to redress the inadequacies inherent in the implementation of the six Dakar goals.

On current rates of progress, African children will wait another 150 years to enter the school gates.

Since the UN Millennium summit, the Dakar Framework for Action has been narrowed to two goals: promoting universal primary education (UPE) and promoting gender equity and empowerment of women. Despite donors' commitment to the achievement of these two goals, the support for most countries in Africa is disappointing.

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) strongly influence national education policies in the continent through the overall context of Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPS) and the new Fast Track Initiative (FTI). The donor community encourages developing countries to formulate FTI plans that articulate sound sector wide programmes - integrated into broader PRSPs and national development priorities.

At regional level, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) adopted two of the Dakar goals: achieving UPE and ensuring improved quality education through curriculum relevance. NEPAD is supposed to be a catalyst and not an implementer but the reality is that there is more talk and papers than concrete actions in the field of development.

The Eighth Conference of Ministers of Education of the African member states (MINEDAF VIII), convened in Dar es Salaam in December, 2002, made strong commitments to mobilizing resources and political will to realize the EFA goals. The ministers resolved to increase investment in basic education to at least 20% of their national budgets. The reality is that all Ministers signed the Algiers Declaration, but the majority of countries are still between 5 -10% of national budget allocation to education. Communities are still cost-sharing the education service delivery with governments by providing labour, building materials, rehabilitation of infrastructure, paying cash for school fees and learning materials in many countries.

Conflicts and the HIV/AIDS pandemic are having a devastating impact on many countries in the various sub-regions and making attainment of the 2015 EFA targets in those countries more and

more difficult to reach. IDP's (?) and orphans are another vulnerable group which requires more and more attention from governments and international partners. The reality is that only non governmental organizations target them through concrete actions because for the central governments, these are the hardest to reach.

Achieving EFA in Africa in year 2015 will require at least 4 Millions of qualified and motivated teachers and this cost a lot of money, 80% of that money should come from African countries national budget.

The gender parity goal in 2005 has been missed by more than 65% of the African countries in sub-saharan countries, the index is very low in the majority of these countries (between 0.5 to 0.7)

The status of non formal education and adult education is critical in a continent where more than 60% of children drop out from schools every year and where more than 1/3 of children are missing an education (see some evidence advocacy related to literacy in Africa below)

Literacy is:

- A right still denied to nearly a fifth of the world's adult population.
- Essential to achieving each of the EFA goals.
- A societal and an individual phenomenon, with attention needed to both dimensions.
- Crucial for economic, social and political participation and development, especially in today's knowledge societies.
- Key to enhancing human capabilities, with wide ranging benefits including critical thinking, improved health and family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention, children's education, poverty reduction and active citizenship.

**The literacy challenge has absolute and relative dimensions, particularly affects the poor, women and marginalized groups, and is much greater than conventional measures indicate:**

- In absolute numbers, those without literacy skills are mainly in sub-Saharan Africa. Prospects for meeting the 2015 goal hinge largely on progress in the in Africa and Asia countries where 75% of those without literacy skills live.
- In relative terms, the regions with the lowest literacy rates are sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, and the Arab States, all with literacy rates around only 60%, despite increases of more than 10 percentage points since 1990.
- Illiteracy is associated to a significant extent with extreme poverty.
- Women are less literate than men: worldwide, only 88 adult women are considered literate for

every 100 adult men, with much lower numbers in low income countries such as Bangladesh (62 per 100 men) and Pakistan (57 per 100 men).

- 132 of the 771 million people without literacy skills are aged 15 to 24 (45% are in sub-saharan Africa), despite an increase in this group's literacy rate to 85%, from 75% in 1970.
- Direct testing of literacy suggests that the global challenge is much greater than the conventional numbers, based on indirect assessments, would indicate, and that it affects both developed and developing countries.

**The literacy challenge can be met only if:**

- Political leaders at the highest level commit themselves to action. The current figures for Africa is a big shame (in Africa only 1% of national education budget allocated to literacy and non formal education)
- Countries adopt explicit literacy policies to:

Expand quality primary and lower-secondary education;  
Scale up youth and adult literacy programmes;  
Develop rich literate environments.

**Scaling up literacy programmes for youth and adults requires:**

- Active government responsibility for quality adult literacy policy and financing as part of education sector planning.
- Clear frameworks to coordinate public, private and civil society provision of literacy programmes.
- Increased budgetary and aid allocations. Literacy programmes receive a mere 1% of the education budget in many countries. An additional US\$2.5 billion a year to 2015 will likely be needed to make significant progress towards the Dakar literacy goal.
- Basing programmes on an understanding of learners' demands, especially their language preferences and their motivations for attending class, in consultation with local communities.
- Curricula that build on these demands, with clearly stated learning objectives and the provision of adequate learning materials.
- Adequate pay, professional status and training opportunities for literacy educators.
- Appropriate language policies, as most countries facing stark literacy challenges are linguistically diverse. The use of mother tongues is pedagogically sound but must offer a smooth transition to learning opportunities in regional and official languages.

## **Developing literate environments and literate societies requires sustained attention to:**

- Language policies.
- Book publishing policies.
- Media policies.
- Access to information.
- Policies to get books and reading materials into schools and homes.

Acquiring, improving and using literacy skills happens at all levels of education, and in multiple formal and non-formal contexts. Achieving each of the EFA goals depends strongly on policies that foster literate societies and set high standards for literacy, the foundation for further learning.

Ministers of Education in Africa have the responsibility to promote quality education for all on an equitable basis in order to ensure the proper exercise of the rights of learners to education and redress of any inequalities in the promotion of education but they cannot make this happen without the support of the Ministers of finances and the parliamentarians.

Ministers of finances and parliamentarians should increase and sustain education spending in line with the agreed regional target of 20% minimum of their national budget and 2/3 at least set a side for basic education. This increased government and donors spending should target the following areas:

- Ensuring access to education for girls and children affected by HIV/AIDS
- Empowering women by making gender equality a reality and not political rhetoric
- Making education free, universal and compulsory
- Improving the training, morale and status of teachers
- Reversing the decline in spending on illiterate adults (women in particular) and out of school youth)

Monitoring the EFA progress in Africa remain a big challenge for both governments and the civil society organisations, ANCEFA since August 2006 has launched the Africa education watch process involving 16 countries in sub-saharan African into pilot country studies which will constitute in the next three years an independent citizen watch providing alternative data on education in the continent. (see ANCEFA website [www.ancefa.org](http://www.ancefa.org) )