

A Twin Education Crisis is Holding Back Africa

Millions are not at school, millions more are failing to learn



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ABOUT THE AFRICA PROGRESS PANEL

The Africa Progress Panel (APP) consists of ten distinguished individuals from the private and public sector, who advocate on global issues of importance to Africa and the world. Mr Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations and Nobel laureate, chairs the APP and is closely involved in its day-to-day work.

The other Panel members are Michel Camdessus, Peter Eigen, Bob Geldof, Graça Machel, Olusegun Obasanjo, Linah Mohohlo, Robert Rubin, Tidjane Thiam and Muhammad Yunus.



Kofi Annan



Michel Camdessus



Peter Eigen



Bob Geldof



Graça Machel



Olusegun Obasanjo



Linah Mohohlo



Robert Rubin



Tidjane Thiam



Muhammad Yunus

ABOUT THE AFRICA PROGRESS REPORT

The Africa Progress Report, the Africa Progress Panel's flagship annual publication, draws on the best research and analysis available on Africa and compiles it in a refreshing and provocative manner. Through the report, the Panel recommends policy choices and actions for African policy makers, international partners and civil society organisations.

This policy paper is drawn from the Africa Progress Report 2012, whose preparation and research was led by Caroline Kende-Robb (Africa Progress Panel), Kevin Watkins (Brookings Institution), Peter da Costa (Africa Progress Panel) and Richard Manning (Oxford University). Andrew Johnston (Consultant) edited the paper.

Contact the Africa Progress Panel

For media requests or more information, please contact: info@africaprogresspanel.org.

Website: www.africaprogresspanel.org

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Education has the capacity to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Go to any poor rural village or urban slum and you will find Africans who share that view.

”

– Graça Machel

IT'S NOT JUST HOW MANY CHILDREN GO TO SCHOOL – IT'S WHAT THEY LEARN THERE

Learning drives economic growth, fuels innovation and creates jobs. It equips countries – and people – with the skills they need to escape poverty and build prosperity. And it gives people the power to build more secure livelihoods, enjoy better health and participate in political processes that affect their lives. For all of these reasons, Africa's ongoing education crisis demands the urgent attention of political leaders and aid partners.

We do not use the word "crisis" lightly. In education, as in other areas, much has been achieved over the past decade. Enrolment levels have soared. More children are making it through primary education into secondary school. Gender gaps have narrowed. Many countries have registered a pace of advance that would have been inconceivable when the Millennium Development Goals were established.

Yet, on current trends, the target of universal primary education by 2015 will be missed by a wide margin, leaving millions of children out of school – and there are worrying indications that progress may be slowing. Meanwhile, many of the children in school are receiving an education of such abysmal quality that they are learning very little. Far from accumulating "21st century skills", millions of Africa's children are emerging from primary school lacking basic literacy and numeracy.

Why skills matter – for young people and for their countries

The twin education deficits in access to school and learning in school have far-reaching consequences. They are undermining the potential of a whole generation of children and young people, reinforcing social divisions and damaging prospects for sustained and shared economic growth.

Africa's governments have placed considerable emphasis over the past 10 years on putting in place the macroeconomic policies needed to support growth – and rightly so. But the kind of broad-based growth that Africa needs is simply not possible if its people lack the necessary skills and capabilities on which dynamic and broad-based growth depend.

Left unattended, this imbalance in priorities will have damaging consequences for Africa's future. In an increasingly interconnected and knowledge-based global economy, today's disparities in education are tomorrow's inequalities in income, trade and investment. More than ever, the prosperity of nations hinges less on what countries have (their natural resource capital) than on what their citizens are able to learn (their human capital). And what is true for countries is also true for people. Those denied an opportunity to develop their potential through education face the prospect of marginalisation, poverty and insecure employment.

It's time for African governments to take action

Education has the potential to transform Africa's social and economic development. Unlocking that potential will require governments to act with urgency on three fronts.

First, every government needs to redouble its efforts to ensure that all children are in school by 2015.

Second, far greater attention must be directed towards the quality of education and learning achievement. Africa needs to embrace what researchers at the Brookings Institution have described as a "global compact on learning" – a compact that puts a premium on results. Shortly after Ghana's independence, its first president, Kwame Nkrumah, said: "We shall measure progress by the number of children in school, and by the quality of their education."¹ Too many governments – and donors – have forgotten the quality part of the equation.

The third priority goes to the heart of the wider agenda for jobs, justice and equity. Both in access and education quality, Africa has some of the world's most glaring education inequalities. Most countries' constitutions enshrine the right of all citizens to an education, without regard to their circumstances. Yet all too often, being born into a poor family, living in a rural area, being female or coming from a conflict-affected region means suffering extreme disadvantage in education. These inequalities are slowing down progress towards the MDGs, reinforcing

¹ Nkrumah, K. n.d. quotes from Kwame Nkrumah. Pan African Perspective. Accessed on 20 April, 2012. Available from <http://www.panafricanperspective.com/nkrumahquotes.html>

wider social disparities and undermining economic growth. That is why governments need to put equity at the centre of their education strategies.

Some impressive progress has been made...

Measured by the number of children sitting in classrooms, Africa has registered some remarkable achievements. The net enrolment rate, which measures the proportion of primary-school-age children registered for school, increased from 60 per cent in 2000 to 76 per cent in 2009. Over the same period, out-of-school numbers fell from 42 million to 30 million.² Given that Africa has the world's fastest-growing primary-school-age population, these outcomes are even more impressive than the headline data suggest. Gender disparities have also declined. And there has been a marked increase in secondary school participation, with the enrolment rate increasing from 24 to 34 per cent.

When the MDG commitments were made in 2000, few observers would have predicted the achievements registered by many countries. Tanzania had over 3 million children out of school and enrolment was declining. Today the country is within touching distance of universal primary enrolment. From Burkina Faso to Ethiopia, Mozambique, Senegal and Zambia, one country after another has made a breakthrough in enrolment.

...but millions of children are still not in school...

Impressive as the growth in school participation may be, Africa is not on track to achieve the MDG targets. If the trend from 2004 to 2009 is continued, there will still be 17 million out of school in 2025 – two primary-school generations after the 2015 target date for universal education.³ Disconcerting as these figures are, they tell only a partial story. Another 12 million African children enter school only to drop out before completing a full primary-school cycle, driven away by factors such as formal and informal fees, the cost of textbooks and the poor quality of education.

Young girls face distinct barriers. Many start school late, and early marriage often cuts short their school years.

In Niger and Chad, over 30 per cent of young girls are married before the age of 15, and for a far wider group of countries – including Mali, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Burkina Faso – over half marry by 18.⁴

Africa's education deficits do not end with primary education. There are 19 million adolescents out of school, many of them making the transition to work without having completed a basic education.⁵ Stated bluntly, Africa's human capital foundations are too weak to sustain dynamic economic growth and shared prosperity.

...because many groups face stark disadvantage

Behind the statistics that measure average progress across Africa lie deep inequalities in access to education. The poor, women, ethnic minorities, rural children and other marginalised groups suffer from discrimination and disadvantage that create social fault-lines running through the region's education systems.

As countries have moved closer to universal access, the challenge of combating these disparities has been brought into sharper focus. Continued progress towards the goal of universal primary education by 2015 will require interventions that reach those who have been left behind.

Gender inequalities remain endemic. While the disparities are narrowing, girls still account for a disproportionate share of out-of-school children. There are just 8 girls for every 10 boys in secondary school.⁶

Wealth gaps and regional disparities are equally marked. Children from the poorest households are less likely to get into school, and those who do enter are more likely to drop out. In Mali, young adults from the poorest 20 per cent of households have received on average five years less education than those from the wealthiest households – and this is not atypical.

Reaching the marginalized: the greatest education challenge

None of these inequalities operates in isolation. Disadvantages linked to wealth, gender and

² UNESCO (2011). Regional Overview: Sub-Saharan Africa. UNESCO. Accessed on 6 April, 2012 from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001913/191393e.pdf>

³ Africa Progress Panel (APP) calculations

⁴ Brown, G. (2012). Out of wedlock, into school: combatting child marriage through education. The Office of Gordon and Sarah Brown Limited. London.

⁵ UNESCO (2011). Out-of-school adolescents, UNESCO

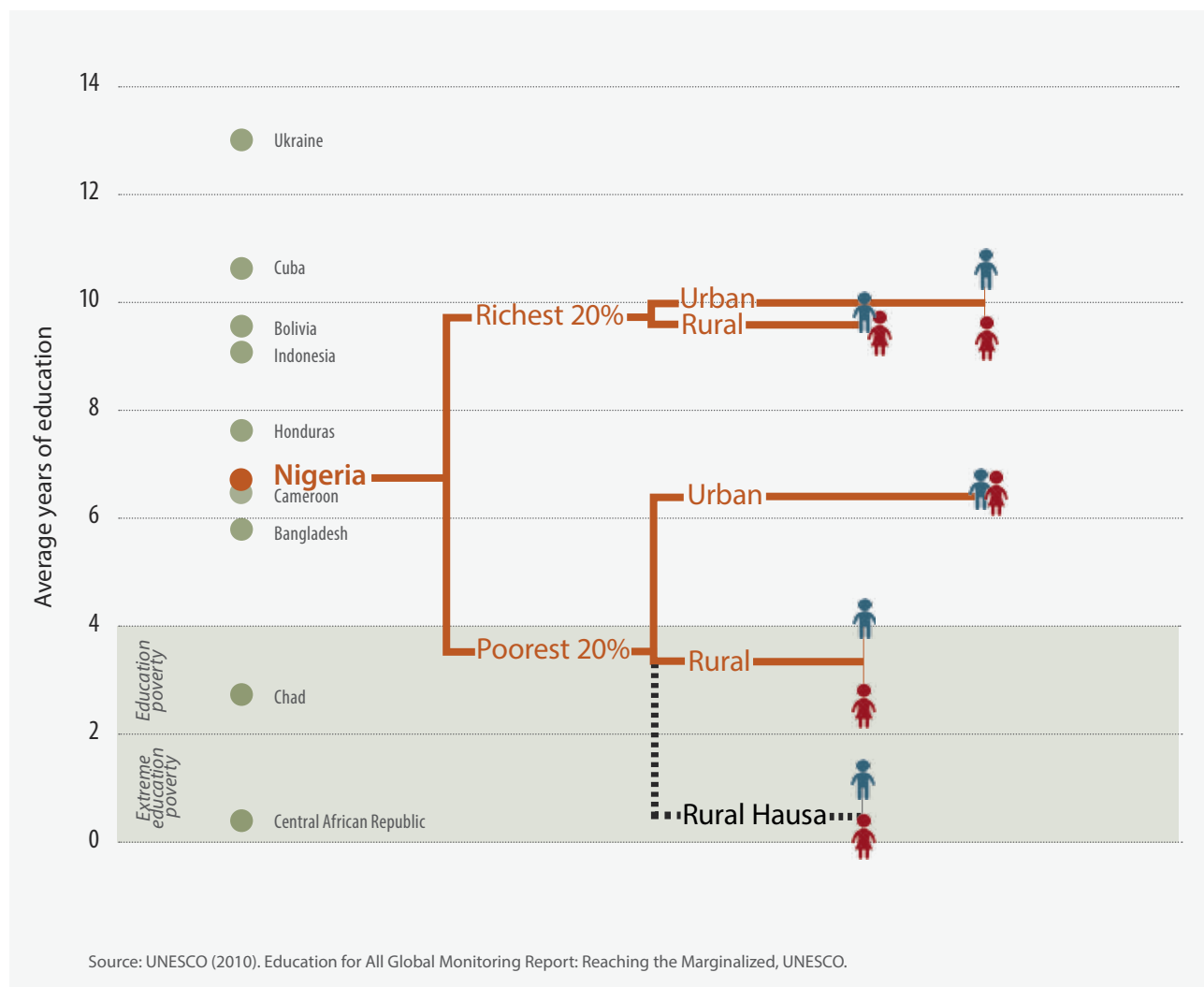
⁶ Turney, H. (2012). Our silent education crisis. The Global Team Accessed in April 2012. Available from <http://theglobalteam.org/2012/01/28/our-silent-education-crisis/>

location have mutually reinforcing effects. UNESCO's Education for All Global Monitoring Report developed a measurement tool – the Deprivation and Marginalization in Education indicator – that charts the impact of overlapping inequalities in limiting opportunities for education. One illustration comes from Nigeria, where poor rural Hausa women aged 17 to 22 average less than one year in school. The comparable figure for urban males from wealthy households is over nine years in school⁷ (Figure 1). Africa's pastoralist communities provide another illustration of the region's overlapping inequalities. Among those aged 17 to 22

in Senegal, 57 per cent of women report having less than two years of education. For women from the pastoralist Poular community, that figure rises to 80 per cent. Similar patterns of disadvantage occur in Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya (Figure 2).

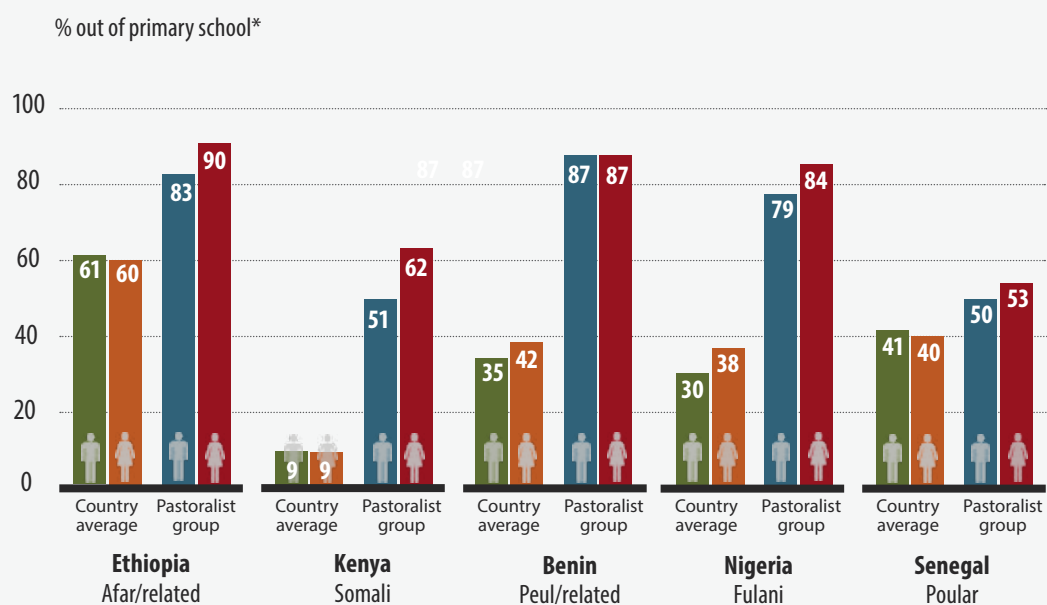
Accelerated progress towards universal access to education will require a far stronger focus on the most marginalised children – including child labourers, girls forced into early marriage, children living in urban slums and remote rural areas, disadvantaged ethnic groups, and the disabled.

Figure 1: THE EDUCATION INEQUALITY TREE - THE CASE OF NIGERIA IN 2003

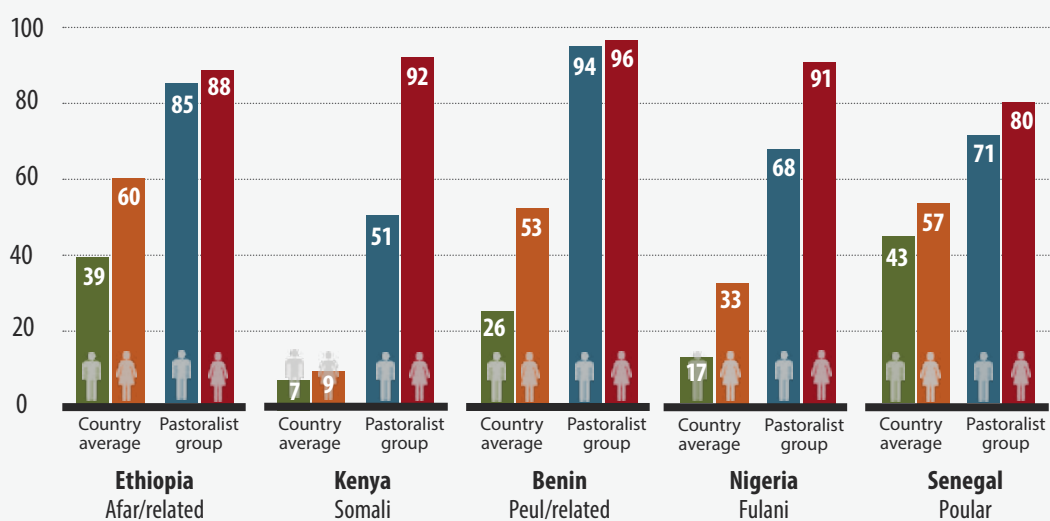


⁷ UNESCO (2010). Education for All Global Monitoring Report: Reaching the Marginalized. UNESCO

Figure 2: PASTORALISTS FACE EXTREME EDUCATION DEPRIVATION



Extreme education poverty: population aged 17 to 22 with fewer than two years of education (%)



Notes: *% out of primary school: proportion of children of primary school age.

Source: UNESCO (2010). Education for All Global Monitoring Report: Reaching the Marginalized, UNESCO.

In Africa's schools, millions are failing to learn

If getting more children into school has been a partial success story, the evidence on what they are learning points in a different direction. Africa's schools are failing millions of children. Zambia, for example, has made rapid progress towards universal primary school enrolment, with over 90 per cent of primary-school-age children in school. But half of the children in the last grade are unable to meet basic literacy standards. Such outcomes are the rule, not the exception.

Governments across the region invest heavily in education. Public spending on education averages over 5 per cent of GDP, one of the highest levels for any region in the world. Since 2009, average annual spending has increased by 6 per cent a year. Yet learning outcomes fall far short of the levels needed to unlock the potential of education to act as a force for sustained growth, innovation and accelerated poverty reduction.

Skills deficits among Africa's youth

There are 173 million young Africans aged 15 to 24. The majority have made the transition from childhood to the world of work with limited education. Only a minority went to secondary school, and the majority did not complete primary education. These education deficits are reflected in labour markets. Youth unemployment rates in Sub-Saharan Africa are second only to those in the Middle East and North Africa, with one in five affected. Those in employment often face lives of working poverty. In Malawi, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, more than 70 per cent of working youth live on less than \$1.25 a day. The skills deficits facing Africa's youth represent

an enormous cost to society in terms of lost potential for economic growth and social cohesion. Yet few countries have put in place, on the scale required, strategies for providing "second-chance" education programmes for young people who missed out in their earlier years. They should also offer technical and vocational education and training plus support for training in the informal sectors where the vast majority of Africa's young people work.

Education inequalities in global perspective

The scale of the education divide that separates Sub-Saharan Africa from other parts of the world is not sufficiently recognized. In the United States and much of Europe, a typical child reaching primary school age can anticipate 15 to 18 years in full-time education. Around 70 per cent will go beyond secondary school and into tertiary education – the gateway to the higher levels of knowledge development.

Africa is at the other end of the global distribution. UNESCO's Education for All Global Monitoring Report has used survey evidence to document the number of years spent in education by those aged 20 to 24 across Africa. In Mozambique, 40 per cent reported less than four years of schooling, rising to 50 per cent or more in Senegal, Ethiopia, Chad and Mali.⁸ Today, a child entering the primary school system in Burkina Faso has less chance of reaching the last grade than a counterpart in Europe has of making it to university. The enrolment rate for tertiary education is just 6 per cent, which is half the level in South Asia and one quarter of the level in East Asia or Latin America. Measured on the standard criteria for participation in education, Sub-Saharan African children and youth have been cut adrift from the rise of opportunity.

AN AGENDA FOR ADDRESSING AFRICA'S EDUCATION CRISIS

Education is where sound economics and ethical imperatives come together to make an overwhelming case for action in favour of jobs and of justice. Good-quality education is a solid investment with high rates of return in terms of economic growth and employment creation. And learning is the birthright of all African children, irrespective of their circumstances.

The early years are crucial to future learning

Efforts to tackle the crisis in education have to start long before children enter school. Good health and

nutrition is critical. Learning outcomes in education are strongly affected by the nutritional status of children in their early years, especially the first two years of life – but one in every three of Africa's children experience chronic malnutrition in their early years.

Undernutrition affects cognitive development by causing structural damage to the brain and impairing motor development. Stunting by the age of two, one of the most sensitive indicators of undernutrition during foetal and post-natal life, is strongly associated with weakened cognitive development, especially when combined with household poverty. In sub-Saharan

⁸ UNESCO (2011) Education for All Global Monitoring Report. UNESCO Accessed on 20 April, 2012. Available from http://www.icde.org/UNESCO+-+Education+for+All+Global+Monitoring+Report+2011.b7C_wtbUXx.ips

Africa, 38% of children under the age of five suffer from moderate or severe stunting.

Evidence from middle-income developing countries suggests that children who are stunted lose the equivalent of two grades in education, and another two grades as a result of diminished learning. That evidence goes some way towards explaining the high dropout rates and abysmal learning outcomes that characterise education systems across Africa. With around half of children in eastern Africa and one-third in western Africa stunted, and malnutrition levels falling very slowly over time, governments need to recognize that hunger is an education policy issue.

Governments across Africa need to do far more to join up early childhood and education policies. Every country should have a “first 1,000 days” strategy covering the critical period from conception to age two, when much of the brain’s architecture is formed. There should also be a concerted effort to expand pre-schooling, with centres linked to schools delivering both early learning and nutritional support.

Access and learning – delivering on the MDG promise

Looking towards 2015, there is an unfortunate air of resignation hanging over much of the region. Many governments and donors appear to view a large shortfall against the MDG targets in education as an inevitable outcome. Indeed, much of the debate surrounding the MDGs in education has moved on to dialogue on the “post-2015” agenda.

Without discounting the importance of this dialogue, the shift in priorities is premature. As many countries across the region have demonstrated, rapid progress towards the 2015 goals is possible. Both Tanzania and Ethiopia reduced out-of-school numbers by over 3 million in the first half of the decade after 2000. The immediate challenge for governments and their development partners is to identify strategies aimed at getting more children into school, reducing dropout rates and improving learning achievement levels.

Some of the barriers to participation in education can be swiftly removed through well-designed policies. Classrooms can be constructed closer to the communities they serve. Cost barriers can be lowered by eliminating fees and targeting support to disadvantaged regions and students. Bursaries can be

used to create incentives for parents to keep girls in school and out of early marriage.

Overcoming the learning achievement deficits will require deeper institutional reforms. Overcrowded classrooms, shortages of textbooks and a dilapidated school infrastructure are part of the problem in many countries – but it is the easier part to fix. The more difficult part revolves around teaching. With a deficit of around 1 million teachers, Africa urgently needs to step up recruitment.⁹ However, far more needs to be done to raise the quality of teaching.

Many of Africa’s teachers enter classrooms with limited subject knowledge. One survey found that fewer than half of grade 6 teachers in Mozambique, Uganda and Malawi were able to score at the top of the competency level for the pupils.¹⁰ Teaching is typically delivered in rote fashion. In-service support systems are weak. And whether as a result of low morale, poor pay or a lack of accountability, Africa’s schools are plagued by an epidemic of teacher absenteeism.

Governments can do far more to raise the bar of ambition in learning. Basic learning-assessment tools can be used to identify failing schools and pupils. Teacher deployment and education financing can be geared towards the most disadvantaged schools rather than, as is currently the case in most countries, towards the more advantaged. Critically, far more emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring that the school curriculum, teachers, and teaching materials are geared towards equipping children with the early-grade reading and numeracy skills that they need to progress.

In retrospect, the MDG framework may have inadvertently deflected attention away from learning and created an incentive for governments – and donors – to concentrate their efforts on getting more children into school. The debate on the post-2015 development goals provides an opportunity to correct this failing. Whatever the framework that emerges from the ongoing dialogue, it should include a meaningful goal for learning achievement, and provide for effective monitoring of progress towards that goal. As a minimum, the post-2015 learning goal should include the twin target of getting all children into school, while at the same time ensuring that no child is unable to perform basic literacy and numeracy tasks after three years.

⁹ UNESCO (2011). Sub-Sahara Africa needs more than one million teachers. UNESCO. Accessed on 6 April, 2012. Available from http://www.unesco.org/new/en/dakar/about-this-office/singleview/news/sub_saharan_af-rica_needs_more_than_one_million_teachers/

¹⁰ Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education quality (2010). Project results: Pupil achievement levels in reading and mathematics.

Aligning education, skills development and employment

Many young people entering labour markets in Africa have not completed primary education. One survey covering Senegal, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia found that over half of informal-sector workers had only a primary school education, or less.¹¹ By far the most important source of skills development for workers in the informal sector is traditional apprenticeship and on-the-job training. In Ghana, it is estimated that 80–90 per cent of basic skills training comes from traditional apprenticeships, compared with 5–10 per cent from public training institutions.¹² There are encouraging signs to suggest that

governments in Africa are starting to address the skill deficits among youth populations. The African Development Bank has identified several countries – including Cameroon, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Mozambique – that have strengthened coordination between different skills development agencies. Members of the African Union are developing a new framework for technical and vocational education and training, linked to tools for assessing the skills that young people will need to gain employment. For example, the Kenyan government has developed a public–private partnership to train 20,000 skilled information technology workers. Several donors – including Japan and Germany – have scaled up aid for vocational programmes.

THE KEY ROLE OF AID DONORS

African governments themselves have to provide leadership in tackling the twin crisis in access and learning. At the same time, the MDGs and the Education for All compact commit to providing support for national efforts. When donors signed the plan of action for achieving Education for All in 2000, they pledged that “no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by lack of resources.”¹³

It is difficult to square that pledge with the record on aid delivery. Best estimates suggest that, even with a strengthened domestic resource mobilisation effort, the poorest countries in Africa and elsewhere need around \$16 billion annually in education aid to reach the Education for All goals. However, aid levels have stagnated at around \$3 billion a year. While the overall aid envelope for education did expand in 2010, Sub-Saharan Africa – with the partial exception of Ethiopia – was bypassed.

Aid donors have justifiably pressed African governments to increase levels of support for education – and

they, too, must hold to the MDG promise. The Global Campaign for Education has called on the donor community to allocate 10 per cent of overall aid to basic education in the poorest countries. This is a target that most could reach – in some cases, as in France and Germany, by reallocating aid to primary basic education in Africa that is currently diverted to domestic education providers. The World Bank has pledged to increase support to basic education by \$750 million from now to 2015.

Education should be a central element in a big push to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Governments in Africa should put in place policies aimed explicitly at reaching children who are being left behind, and raising their learning achievement levels. For their part, donors should pledge to support these policies through more flexible and responsive financing. Converting the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) into an independent global fund could help to galvanise the support and mobilise the financing needed to underpin the compact that we envisage.

¹¹ Adams, Arvil V. (2008). Skills development in the Informal sector of Sub-Saharan Africa. World Bank

¹² Emmanuel, J. (2007). World Development Report: Development and the next generation. World Bank.

¹³ UNESCO (2000). Dakar Framework for Action. Education for all: meeting our collective commitments. Accessed on 6 April, 2012. Available from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf>.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Set targets for expanding early childhood care and education by 2015;
- Accelerate progress towards universal primary education by focusing on marginalised groups;
- Improve education quality and learning outcomes so that all children can read, write and meet basic numeracy standards after three years in school;
- Raise the quality of teacher training and in-service support;
- Strengthen second-chance education and accelerated learning programs;
- Ensure post-primary education to offers the skills needed for secure livelihoods and jobs.

SELECTED POLICY ACTION

Develop equitable education strategies that:

- Expand early childhood care under an integrated health and education framework that breaks the link between hunger, poverty and parental illiteracy on the one side and educational disadvantage on the other;
- Accelerate progress towards universal primary education by developing national action plans for 2015 with specific targets for hard-to-reach children;
- Strengthen equity in public spending by targeting disadvantaged regions, schools and pupils, including girls and marginalised groups;
- Expand "second-chance" education programs targeting adolescents, youth and young adults who missed out on education in their early years;
- Engage with the business community to improve the alignment between education and employment, equipping Africa's youth with the skills they need to obtain secure livelihoods;
- Extend education opportunities to the 54 million 5- to 14-year-olds trapped in child labour;
- Put in place a national learning assessment system, reform teacher training and develop a curriculum to facilitate effective child-centred learning.

Development partners:

- Build on the achievements of the Global Partnership for Education to create a global fund for education that provides additional financing and flexible support for the 2015 national action plans for achieving education for all;
- Honour commitments made in 2000 by providing \$16 billion a year in aid for basic education in low-income countries;
- Act on the commitment to increase World Bank IDA lending to basic education by \$750 million over the period 2011 to 2015. Using a baseline that reflects actual lending over the past three to five years, this commitment implies that IDA loans for basic education should average \$1.1 billion to \$1.3 billion annually;
- Strengthen support for education in countries affected by conflict or embarking on post-conflict reconstruction, by creating or expanding pooled funding arrangements and increasing the share of humanitarian aid directed to education. Support an "education catch-up" plan in South Sudan as an immediate priority;
- Support conditional and unconditional cash transfer programs targeting households with child labourers;
- Create mechanisms through which the African and global business community can more effectively support national efforts to accelerate progress in education.

The Africa Progress Panel promotes Africa's development by tracking progress, drawing attention to opportunities and catalyzing action.

PANEL MEMBERS

Kofi Annan

Chair of the Africa Progress Panel, former Secretary-General of the United Nations and Nobel Laureate

Michel Camdessus

Former Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund

Peter Eigen

Founder and Chair of the Advisory Council, Transparency International and Chairman of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative

Bob Geldof

Musician, businessman, founder and Chair of Band Aid, Live Aid and Live8, co-founder of DATA and ONE advisor and advocate

Graça Machel

President of the Foundation for Community Development and founder of New Faces New Voices

Linah Kelebogile Mohohlo

Governor, Bank of Botswana

Olusegun Obasanjo

Former President of Nigeria

Robert Rubin

Co-Chairman of the Board, Council on Foreign Relations and former Secretary of the United States Treasury

Tidjane Thiam

Chief Executive Officer, Prudential Plc.

Muhammad Yunus

Economist, founder of Grameen Bank and Nobel Laureate

Africa Progress Panel

P.O. Box 157
1211 Geneva 20
Switzerland

info@africaprogresspanel.org
www.africaprogresspanel.org

The cover design is inspired by the pattern found on the Ethiopian magic scroll of Wälättä-Gabriel from the 19th century. Magic scrolls are a traditional form of talismanic and figurative art from the Horn of Africa.

The Africa Progress Panel prints in a responsible manner.