

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

As described in previous chapters Sri Lanka has succeeded in ensuring a high level of access and a good coverage at the primary and secondary levels of education. High enrolment rates, high participation in both primary and secondary levels, high literacy rates, and social indicators are evidence for it. Today the country faces second generation problems, concerning the quality, equality and efficiency of the education system.

This concluding chapter examines education and quality issues of EFA that should be on-track to being realised by 2015. It then proposes the elements of a policy agenda for education authorities, for civil society organisations, and for international agencies and donors to accelerate these, focusing on neglected goals that are lagging behind progress towards EFA.

8.2 Trends and Prospects for 2015

The period from 2000 to 2005, as chapters 1 and 2 show, was one of sharp growth in enrolment in ECCE. Chapter 3 shows enrolment in primary level is near to achieving universal targets. Gender parity is almost achieved in enrolment and participation. The poor quality of education has become a major issue island-wide, and the goals pertaining to life skills of young children, youth and adults have been relatively neglected.

For the three goals that have an explicit quantitative target - goal 2 (universalisation of primary education) goal 4 (reduction by half the level of adult illiteracy) and goal 5 (elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education) relevant education indicators between 2000 and 2005 were analysed, extrapolating trends observed in each district. It is important to note that these are

extrapolations of past trends. This does not reflect the impact of education policy changes on education indicators and thus may not reflect the impact of recently implemented education policies. What they show is whether the continuation of ongoing trends is consistent with achievement of a given goal by 2015.

8.3 Early Childhood Care and Education

ECCE is receiving increased attention, but much remains to be done. Even without proper data it is evident on present trends that participation rates will remain relatively low to 2015.

For children under 3, there is much less provision than for those aged 3 and over, despite increases in care and pre schooling. The poor and disadvantaged stands to benefit relatively the most from ECCE programmes.

8.4 Achieving Universal Basic Education

The likelihood that this country will achieve universal basic education by 2015 was assessed using the total primary net enrolment ratio which takes into account children of primary school but does not reflect learning, but only enrolment.

The disaggregated data given in the chapter shows the most recent situation and prospects and challenges for the achievement of quality basic education.

8.5 Life skills and lifelong education

Sri Lanka has yet to seriously address the challenging tasks that EFA goal 3 entails: Meeting the diverse learning needs of young people and adults through organised programmes of education, training and the

building of basic skills, psycho-social skills and technical (livelihood) skills.

Given the understandable pressure to extend the cycle of basic education in schools and to expand secondary education, there is a clear risk of disparities between formal and non-formal education becoming further accentuated in coming years. The MoE and other relevant institutions will need to pay much stronger attention to the inclusion of youth and adults in education through literacy, equivalency, life skills and livelihood programmes, which are frequently provided outside formal education.

8.6 Adult Literacy

The likelihood of achieving the adult literacy target by 2015 was assessed at the provincial level in the chapter 5. These figures on adult literacy are based on conventional measures of literacy, such as self reporting of the ability to read or write, rather than results of an actual test of literacy skills. For some pockets of disadvantaged groups, more effort is needed to provide learning opportunities to adults and to accelerate progress, to achieve ECCE and universal primary enrolment.

8.7 Gender Parity in primary and secondary education

In Sri Lanka access and participation of girls in primary and secondary education is almost achieved. Gender parity has been achieved in primary and secondary levels. Boys' participation of secondary education is declining.

8.8 Quality

This report monitors three dimensions of education quality: learning outcomes as measured by national assessments; enabling condition of the school facilities; and quality and quantity of teaching workforce. While it is difficult to extrapolate from existing patterns and trends into the future, the evidence suggests that

the issue of quality in education is gaining the attention of stakeholders island-wide: MoE, provincial education ministries and departments, zonal and divisional education offices, school authorities and parents. Discussions, reports and assessments of education quality have proliferated in recent years.

Despite this growing interest, the accumulated evidence points to the prevalence of weak pupil performance, widespread learning disparities in disadvantage of difficult areas, rural, urban slum and marginalised groups. Providing physical and human resources and management of schools would be a great challenge to provide quality education for all by 2015.

8.9 Role of Ministry of Education

Ministry of Education must focus on the national priorities, appropriately adjusted to each province's individual circumstances. In effect, this means reaffirming the strategies in the Dakar Framework for Action:

1. *All of EFA*- Government must take full responsibility for ECCE, quality, adult literacy and the learning needs of youth and adults, as well as for universal primary education. This may not mean delivering all necessary services through the public sector but it certainly means taking public responsibility and assuring adequate financing, as envisaged at Dakar. In particular, it is important for governments to recognise, as Chapter 3 showed, that there is not necessarily a trade-off between access and quality but that the two can be mutually reinforcing.
2. *Inclusion* of the poorest and most marginalised children, youth and adults, by:
 - (a) ensuring that all children, particularly the marginalised and disadvantaged, have access to good ECCE programmes;
 - (b) expanding the physical infrastructure of the basic education system in rural and disadvantaged urban areas, providing

- mechanisms for teachers to work in these areas and improving their working conditions;
- (c) providing financial support such as scholarships, cash or in-kind transfers to disadvantaged households, appropriately targeted;
 - (d) taking measures to alleviate the need for child labour and allowing for flexible schooling, non-formal equivalency courses and bridging courses to provide for the learning needs of working children and youth;
 - (e) sustaining efforts to assure gender parity, including improving girls' retention in primary and secondary education and addressing the emerging boys' issues at secondary level;
 - (f) promoting inclusive education for the disabled, indigenous people and other disadvantaged groups;
 - (g) promoting a great diversity of youth and adult education programmers through legislation, public funding arrangements and policies, such as regulation and oversight of the government sector and bridges between non-formal and formal education;
 - (h) developing constructive partnerships between governments and the non-government sector to increase access to quality education.
3. *Literacy* – Government needs to step up its efforts on adult literacy through inclusion and quality in primary and lower secondary school and boldly expanding adequately staffed and funded literacy programmes for youth and adults that harness all the different forms of modern media. Policies should be instituted to promote media and publishing, and to encourage reading in schools, the home and the workplace.
 4. *Quality* – Government must ensure that priority is placed on pupils mastering basic skills and competences, with particular attention to:
 - (a) making sure there are enough trained teachers and deploying them appropriately throughout the country;
 - (b) enhancing the professionalism and motivation of teachers by providing ongoing professional development;
 - (c) creating safe and healthy learning environments by providing health programmes, including and nutrition;
 - (d) maximising quality school time in which teachers and pupils are actively engaged in learning activities, notably by creating administrative supports for teachers' presence in the classroom,
 - (e) ensuring that curricula are inclusive and relevant, and that they incorporate HIV/AIDS education, among other measures;
 5. *Capacity development* – In addition to training teachers, government needs to step up its effort to:
 - (a) improve and make better use of the national assessments that are being introduced in growing numbers;
 - (b) develop management capacity at all levels of educational management not just the national level – by paying attention to staff training as well as organisational and institutional structures;
 - (c) improve the timeliness and coverage of the statistics used to formulate policy and monitor progress;
 - (d) coordinate complex multisectoral and multiministry programmes such as ECCE and adult literacy, including with the NGOs that often deliver such programmes;
 - (e) Formally engage civil society in EFA policy formulation, implementation and monitoring.

6. *Finance* – National government must maintain public spending on EFA and, indeed, increase it where necessary. It is critical to ensure that pressure from other priorities does not reduce EFA spending to the minimum necessary for primary school access. Funding is essential for:

- (a) inclusion, with unit costs likely to rise for enrolling the most disadvantaged and marginalised [often in remote areas or requiring special attention such as the disabled or linguistic minorities];
- (b) the expansion of ECCE and literacy, so far neglected both financially and as policy priorities;
- (c) quality, especially as regards teachers and their training and the provision of sufficient textbooks for both teachers and students;
- (d) Capacity development, including for statistical systems and staff training, which are often underfunded.

8.10 Donors and International agencies

Both bilateral and multilateral agencies urgently need to increase the amount of aid and deploy it differently. Measure should be taken to:

- (a) Increase the priority given to basic education compared with other levels, particularly higher education, as soon as possible, no later than 2010.
- (b) raise to at least 10% the share of basic education in bilateral sectoral aid and further increase multilateral aid for basic education;
- (c) within aid to basic education, allocate more to early childhood programmes, literacy, other programmes for youth and adults, and capacity development;

- (d) Improve the geographic distribution of aid to more closely reflect needs, involving a particular focus on most difficult areas and disadvantage areas.

Improving the delivery of aid requires more explicit attention to aligning and harmonising aid behind country-wide Education Sector Development plan.

This requires:

- (a) further aligning all educational programmes, whatever their financing modalities, with government programmes, including through the public expenditure tracking system process and other sector wide approaches;
- (b) working with governments to improve their capacity to absorb larger amounts of aid at all levels of service delivery and improving aid in support of capacity development;
- (c) Reducing the transaction costs governments face in managing multiple aid agency partners, multiple aid missions and multiple reporting requirements. Increasing the quantity and quality of aid requires joint and integrated efforts of all international partners including major multilateral and bilateral agencies, and in particular UNESCO and the other Dakar convening agencies [UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank]. It is vital that such efforts fully involve government and civil society.

Education for all - *truly*

The evidence since Dakar is clear – determined Sri Lanka has made much progress in all areas, and increased aid aligned to national efforts has demonstrably worked to support this progress. We must maintain this momentum – and accelerate it if all the goals are to be met.

Time is short. Only if all stakeholders now embrace and maintain a relentless focus on EFA as a whole, rallying around the key elements of ECCE, inclusion, literacy, quality, capacity development and finance, will the right to education at every age be fulfilled.