

Global learning crisis is costing \$129 billion a year

- In sub-Saharan Africa, over half of children are not learning the basics in reading and maths, whether they are in school or not.

The 11th *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* reveals that a global learning crisis is costing governments \$129 billion a year. Ten per cent of global spending on primary education is being lost on poor quality education that is failing to ensure that children learn. In sub-Saharan Africa, this situation has left 40% of young people unable to read a single sentence. The Report concludes that good teachers are the key to improvement and calls on governments to provide the best in the profession to those who need them most.

This year's Report, *Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all*, warns that without attracting and adequately training enough teachers the learning crisis will last for several generations and hit the disadvantaged hardest. In many sub-Saharan African countries, for example, the Report reveals that only one in five of the poorest children reach the end of primary school having learnt the basics in reading and mathematics.

Poor quality education is leaving a legacy of illiteracy more widespread than previously believed. On current trends, the Report projects that the richest boys in sub-Saharan Africa will achieve universal primary completion in 2021, but the poorest girls will not catch up until 2086. In addition, it will take until the next century for all girls from the poorest families in the region to finish lower secondary school.

In a third of countries analysed by the Report, less than three-quarters of existing primary school teachers are trained to national standards. Mali has one of the most unfavourable ratios, at 92 children for every trained teacher. On its past trend of trained teacher recruitment, Mali would not achieve a ratio of 40 pupils per trained teacher until 2030. In West Africa, where few children are learning the basics, teachers on temporary contracts with low pay and little formal training make up more than half of the teaching force.

"Teachers have the future of this generation in their hands," said UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova. *"We need 5.2 million teachers to be recruited by 2015, and we need to work harder to support them in providing children with their right to a universal, free and quality education. We must also make sure that there is an explicit commitment to equity in new global education goals set after 2015, with indicators tracking the progress of the marginalized so that no one is left behind."*

The Report calculates that the cost of 250 million children around the world not learning the basics translates into a loss of an estimated \$129 billion. In total, 31 countries in sub-Saharan Africa are losing at least half the amount they spend on primary education because children are not learning, rising to 70% in Burundi, for example.

By contrast, the Report shows that ensuring an equal, quality education for all can generate huge economic rewards, increasing a country's gross domestic product per capita by 23 per cent over 40 years. If education inequality in sub-Saharan Africa had been halved to the level of Latin America and the Caribbean, the annual per capita growth rate in the period 2005–2010 would have been 47% higher.

The Report shows that to achieve good quality education for all, governments must provide enough trained teachers, and focus their teacher policies on meeting the needs of the disadvantaged. This means attracting the best candidates into teaching; giving them relevant training; deploying them within countries to areas where they are needed most; and offering them incentives to make a long-term commitment to teaching. In Malawi, for example, a training programme emphasizes practical teaching skills and community outreach to help prepare teachers work effectively in rural areas. The Report also highlights the need to address gender-based violence in schools, a major barrier to quality and equality in education. It underscores the importance of curriculum and assessment strategies to promote inclusion and improve learning. For example, in Cameroon, the switch to local language instruction in the early grades improved learning outcomes.

Pauline Rose, the director of the EFA Global Monitoring Report, said: *“What’s the point in an education if children emerge after years in school without the skills they need? The huge numbers of illiterate children and young people mean it is crucial that equality in access and learning be placed at the heart of future education goals. New goals after 2015 must make sure every child is not only in school, but learning what they need to learn.”*

The Report makes the following recommendations:

- 1. New education goals after 2015 must include an explicit commitment to equity so that every child has an equal chance of an education.** New goals need clear, measurable targets with indicators that will track the progress of the most disadvantaged.
- 2. New goals after 2015 must ensure that every child is in school and learning the basics.** Children do not only have the right to be in school, but also to learn while there, and to emerge with the skills they need to find secure, well-paid work.
- 3. Ensure the best teachers reach the learners who need them most.** National education plans must include an explicit commitment to reaching the marginalized. Teachers should be recruited locally, or have similar backgrounds to disadvantaged learners. Every teacher needs pre- and in-service training on ways to target support to disadvantaged children. Incentives must be provided to ensure the best teachers work in remote, under-served areas. Governments must work to retain their best teachers, providing pay that meets at least their basic needs, good working conditions and a career path.

-ENDS-

For interviews, photos, b-roll, pre-edited videos, quotes or case studies of teachers or children please contact:

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Notes to Editors:

Developed by an independent team and published by UNESCO, the Education for All Global Monitoring Report is an authoritative reference that aims to inform, influence and sustain genuine commitment towards Education for All.

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