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Financial crisis threatens to set back education worldwide, UNESCO report warns

New York, 19 January - The aftershock of the global financial crisis threatens to deprive millions of children in the world's poorest countries of an education, the 2010 Education for All *Global Monitoring Report* warns. With 72 million children still out of school, a combination of slower economic growth, rising poverty and budget pressures could erode the gains of the past decade.

“While rich countries nurture their economic recovery, many poor countries face the imminent prospect of education reversals. We cannot afford to create a lost generation of children deprived of their chance for an education that might lift them out of poverty,” said UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova.

The Global Monitoring Report, developed annually by an independent team and published by UNESCO, assesses progress towards the six Education for All goals to which over 160 countries committed themselves in 2000.

The 2010 Report, *Reaching the marginalized*, charts some striking advances in education over the past decade. Despite these gains, however, the world is not on track to achieve the goal of universal primary education by 2015. The report highlights the ongoing failure of governments to address extreme national inequalities and of donors to mobilize resources on the required scale. The authors estimate the annual financing gap for key education goals at US\$16 billion – a significant increase over previous assessments.

FALLING SHORT OF THE GOALS

The progress of the past decade dispels the myth that poor countries are unable to achieve rapid progress in education. *Reaching the marginalized* warns, however, that many countries are likely to fall far short of the targets adopted in 2000, because of the failure of governments to address inequalities and of donors to deliver on pledges.

About 72 million primary school age children and another 71 million adolescents are not at school, and on current trends, 56 million primary

school age children will still be out of school in 2015. Gender disparities remain deeply engrained, with 28 countries across the developing world having nine or fewer girls in school for every ten boys. There has been little progress towards the goal of halving adult illiteracy – a condition that affects 759 million people, two-thirds of them women.

A COLLECTIVE AID FAILURE

There has been a collective failure by the donor community to act on the pledge made in 2000 that ‘no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by lack of resources’:

The report estimates that low-income countries could raise an additional \$US 7 billion per year, or 0.7% of GDP, by increasing domestic resources and allocating more to education. However, even with this effort, there is still an estimated **financing gap** of US\$16 billion annually for 46 low-income countries that must be bridged to reach the Education for All goals. The authors of the report call on the UN Secretary General to convene a high-level pledging conference in 2010 to address the financing shortfall.

Wealthy countries and international financial institutions have been exaggerating how much aid they have provided. “Rich countries have mobilized a financial mountain to stabilize their financial systems and protect vital social and economic infrastructure, but they have provided an aid molehill for the world’s poor,” said the *Global Monitoring Report*’s director, Kevin Watkins.

The Fast Track Initiative, the centrepiece of multilateral aid for education, needs fundamental reform. Payout rates are very low, developing countries have a weak voice, the private sector’s role is minimal and countries affected by conflict are poorly served.

FIGHTING ‘EDUCATION POVERTY’ IS KEY TO BETTER PROGRESS

Extreme and persistent inequalities linked to poverty, gender, ethnicity and language are holding back progress in education. Using a new measurement tool – the Deprivation and Marginalization in Education data set – the report explores the extent of acute disadvantage, using an ‘**education poverty**’ threshold of four years in school.

The report identifies policies that successfully counteract persistent inequalities, including *improving accessibility and affordability* by cutting fees and informal charges and offering targeted incentives; *strengthening the learning environment* by providing highly skilled teachers and expanded intercultural bilingual teaching; *expanding entitlements and opportunities* by integrating education strategies into wider anti-marginalization policies, such as social protection, reinforced legal entitlements and more fairly distributed public spending.

The full report is available online at:

<http://www.unesco.org/en/efareport/reports/2010-marginalization/embargo-media/>
username & password = media2010

Photos: www.unesco.org/en/photos/efa_2010

A b-roll is also available.

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