



## **UNESCO: Education needs to fundamentally change if we are to reach our global development goals**

The new [Global Education Monitoring \(GEM\) Report](#) by UNESCO, shows the potential for education to propel progress towards all global goals outlined in the new [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) (SDGs). It also shows that education needs a major transformation to fulfill that potential and meet the current challenges facing humanity and the planet.

There is an urgent need for progress in education to speed up. On current trends universal primary education in sub-Saharan Africa will be achieved in 2080; universal lower secondary completion in 2089; and universal upper secondary completion in 2099. This would leave the region 70 years late for the 2030 SDG deadline.

The Report, *Education for people and planet*, shows the need for education systems to step up attention to environmental concerns. While in the majority of countries, education is the best indicator of climate change awareness, half of countries' curricula worldwide do not explicitly mention climate change or environmental sustainability in their content. Despite being one of the regions most affected by the effects of environmental change, sub-Saharan Africa has far fewer mentions of sustainable development in its curricula in comparison with Latin America, Europe and North America.

*“A fundamental change is needed in the way we think about education’s role in global development, because it has a catalytic impact on the well-being of individuals and the future of our planet,”* said UNESCO Director-General, Irina Bokova. *“Now, more than ever, education has a responsibility to be in gear with 21st century challenges and aspirations, and foster the right types of values and skills that will lead to sustainable and inclusive growth, and peaceful living together.”*

Education systems must take care to protect and respect minority cultures and their associated languages, which contain vital information about the functioning of ecosystems. But the Report shows 40% of the global population are taught in a language they don't understand. Sub-Saharan Africa houses the most countries with the highest degree of linguistic diversity.

Education systems need to ensure they are giving people vital skills and knowledge that can support the transition to greener industries, and find new solutions for environmental problems. This also requires education to continue beyond the school walls, in communities and the workplace throughout adulthood. Yet only 6% of adults in the poorest countries have ever attended literacy programmes.

*“If we want a greener planet, and sustainable futures for all, we must ask more from our education systems than just a transfer of knowledge. We need our schools, universities and lifelong learning programmes to focus on economic, environmental and social perspectives that help nurture empowered, critical, mindful and competent citizens.”* said Aaron Benavot, Director of the GEM Report.

There is also an urgent need for education systems to impart higher skills aligned with the needs of growing economies, where job skill sets are fast changing, many being automated. On current trends, by 2020, there will be 45 million too few workers with tertiary education relative to demand. Investing in higher education is particularly

crucial for growth in sub-Saharan Africa: increasing tertiary attainment by one year on average would increase its long-term GDP level by 16%. Yet, in 2014, only 8% were enrolled in tertiary education in the region, far below the second-lowest regional average, that of South and West Asia (23%), and the global average (34%).

Inequality in education, interacting with wider disparities, heightens the risk of violence and conflict. Across 22 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, regions that have very low average education had a 50% chance of experiencing conflict within 21 years. In Sierra Leone, young people who had no education were nine times as likely to join rebel groups as those with at least secondary education. The Report calls on governments to start taking inequalities seriously, tracking them by collecting information directly from families.

The Report emphasizes that the new global development agenda calls for education ministers and other education actors to work in collaboration with other sectors. It lists various benefits that could come from this way of working, including:

- Educating mothers to lower secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa by 2030 could prevent 3.5 million child deaths between 2050-60.
- Health interventions could be delivered through schools: by one estimation, delivering simple treatments such as micronutrient pills through schools is one tenth of the cost of doing it through mobile health units.
- Farmer field schools could help increase crop yields by 12% leading to sustainable increases in food production

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**For more information, for photos, b-roll, infographics, an online video and interviews please contact –**

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#### Notes to Editors

Download the Report: <https://bitly.com/sdg4all>

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- [The Global Education Monitoring Report](#) (GEM Report) is developed by an independent team and published by UNESCO. It replaces UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR). [World Education Blog](#) / [Educación Mundial Blog](#)