



UN NEWS CENTRE

With breaking stories and
newswire products from



UN report reveals increasing spending on education in sub-Saharan Africa



School children in Kakuma, Kenya

27 April 2011 – Countries in sub-Saharan Africa have been increasing expenditure on education by six per cent every year over the past decade, but many are still lagging in efforts to provide children with quality primary education, the United Nations agency tasked with promoting universal education says in a report unveiled today.

“This report shows very clearly how committed African nations and their partners are to achieving Education for All,” [said](#) Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)).

“It also shows that their efforts are paying dividends, with more children going to school than ever before. This is very encouraging and should spur all of Africa’s partners to provide the support that will help fill the remaining gaps,” she said of the findings of the report, entitled [*Financing Education in sub-Saharan Africa – Meeting the Challenges of Expansion, Equity and Quality*](#).

The document, published by UNESCO’s Montreal-based Institute for Statistics (UIS), presents comprehensive data on the financing of education in 45 African countries and includes historical statistics to track financing trends since the World Education Forum was held in 2000.

The increase in investment on education has been accompanied by some spectacular results in Africa, according to the report, which points out that between 2000 and 2008, the number of children in primary school rose by 48 per cent – from 87 million to 129 million. Enrolment in pre-primary, secondary and tertiary education has also grown by more than 60 per cent during the same period.

Despite the increased spending on education, however, many countries in the region are still a long way from providing every child with a good quality primary education. The most recent data show that in one third of the countries, half of all children do not complete primary education.

Some 32 million children of primary school age are still out of school in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the UNESCO survey, which forecasts that the number will rise as the population of children between the ages of five and 14 years is expected to grow by more than 34 per cent over the next two decades.

On average, education accounts for more than 18 per cent of all public spending in sub-Saharan Africa compared to 15 per cent in other regions. Overall, the region devotes five per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) to education, which is just behind the levels spent by North America and Europe.

The report discounts the assumption that the increased investments were used to absorb the costs associated with the abolition of primary school fees, which dramatically increased enrolment, but also led to over-crowded classrooms in many African countries.

According to the report, public spending on primary education grew at a faster rate than primary enrolment, and points out that many governments not only expanded access to schooling but also sought to improve the quality of education provision.

“The Education for All message has not fallen on deaf ears,” said Hendrik van der Pol, the UIS Director. “Now we need to protect these investments from the current economic storms. Strategic decisions will have to be made based on the facts – not assumptions,” he added.

The report also notes that across the region, families are the largest private financiers of education, providing 30 per cent of all primary education resources, with the proportion rising to 49 per cent and 44 per cent respectively for upper and lower secondary education.

At tertiary level, however, family contributions fall to 22 per cent, meaning that that almost \$8 out of every \$10 spent on tertiary education is subsidised by the government, a situation that raises serious questions of equity.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

[Investing in education will help advance global anti-poverty targets – UN](#)

