



With breaking stories and
newswire products from

UN NEWS CENTRE



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



19 January 2010 – The global financial crisis threatens to deprive millions of children in the world’s poorest countries of an education, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, with a knock-on effect on future economic growth, poverty reduction and progress in health and other areas, according to a United Nations report released today.

“While rich countries nurture their economic recovery, many poor countries face the imminent prospect of education reversals,” UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) Director-General Irina Bokova said, noting the failure of donors to deliver on pledges. “We cannot afford to create a lost generation of children who have been deprived of their chance for an education that might lift them out of poverty.”

UNESCO’s Education for All-Global Monitoring Report 2010, entitled *Reaching the Marginalized*, urges rich countries and the G20 group of developed and developing countries to scale up aid needed to avoid damaging budget adjustments in the poorest countries, stressing that a financing gap of \$16 billion a year must be bridged to reach the Education for All goals.

Rich countries and international and financial institutions are exaggerating how much aid they provide to help poor countries cope with the financial crisis, using ‘smoke and mirrors’ in their reporting, the report says.

"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," Global Monitoring Report director Kevin Watkins said.

At the report's launch at UN Headquarters in New York, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon **stressed** that education is a fundamental human right. "It should never be an accident of circumstance, nor is it a privilege to be distributed on the basis of wealth, gender, race, ethnicity or language," he said.

Ms. Bokova added that the financial crisis could force governments to cut spending for education and parents to pull their children out of school or simply not to send them. "In short, it would create a lost generation at tremendous cost to society," she said.

Mr. Watkins told a later news conference: "The bottom line message of the report is we're an awful long way off track for achieving the international development goal of universal primary education by 2015."

The report charts "spectacular advances" over the past decade in striking contrast with the 'lost decade' of the 1990s, noting that the number of children not attending school has fallen by 33 million since 1999, sub-Saharan Africa has increased enrolment at five times the rate achieved in the 1990s, and the number of children out of school in South and West Asia has been more than halved.

Such numbers dispel the myth that poor countries cannot achieve rapid progress in education, but the report warns that many countries are likely to fall far short of the targets adopted by governments in 2000 because of their failure to address inequalities and donor shortfalls, citing sub-Saharan Africa as an area for priority action. Education systems across the region could end up without \$4.6 billion per year in public spending for both last and this year due to the crisis.

Global indicators highlighted as cause for concern include:

- On current trends, 56 million primary school-age children will still be out of school in 2015.
- Another 71 million adolescents are currently not at school.
- Gender disparities remain deeply engrained, with girls accounting for 54 per cent of children out of school.
- 10.3 million additional teachers will be needed worldwide to achieve the goal of universal primary education by 2015.
- There has been little progress towards the goal of halving adult illiteracy that affects 759 million people, two-thirds of them women.
- Malnutrition remains a major barrier to progress in education, with 178 million children up to the age of five years affected and the numbers rising.
- Far too many young people leave primary school unable to read or write. In some sub-Saharan countries, adults with five years of primary schooling have a 40 per cent chance of illiteracy.

The report cautions that the reality may be worse than the picture provided in national data. Using household survey data analysis, it presents evidence that school records overstate the number of primary school-age children in school by as much as 30 per cent.

Identifying policies to counteract persistent inequalities in education, it calls on governments to improve accessibility and affordability by going beyond removing formal school fees for basic education to cutting informal charges and providing targeted incentives for disadvantaged groups. Governments should also ensure that marginalized children have

access to highly skilled teachers by offering incentives for deployment in remote rural and disadvantaged urban areas.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

Even fewer will attend school due to falling basic education aid – UNESCO