ENDING THE **HIDDEN EXCLUSION**

Learning and equity in education post-2015

Save the Children

Cover caption:

Sonam, eight, goes to class in the Anandayi Centre, a state-supported school located in Jhuggi Jhoparpatti Colony, a poor, overcrowded neighbourhood in west Delhi, India. Sonam walks 2 kilometres every morning to go to school. While she does receive free education and a hot mid-day meal at school, Sonam finds it hard to follow her lessons.

Photo credit: Madhuri Dass/ Save the Children

Save the Children is the world's leading independent organisation for children. We work in 120 countries. We save children's lives; we fight for their rights; we help them fulfill their potential.

We work together, with our partners, to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The last decade has witnessed enormous progress in expanding access to education worldwide. The job is not yet finished: 61 million primary school-aged children are still denied the opportunity to learn. But as we continue to make progress and look ahead to 2015 and beyond, it is vital to shine a light on the 'hidden exclusion' affecting children's education around the world.

When a child is out of school it is an obvious injustice and exclusion, but millions more in-school children suffer because they are not given the opportunity to learn. There are 130 million children in school who are not learning even the basics – a shocking figure masked by the focus in recent decades on getting more children into classrooms. As we look forward to the next set of global development goals, the focus needs to be on ensuring that no child is excluded – that every child, including the poorest and most disadvantaged, is both in school *and* learning.

Expanding educational opportunity in this way will be one fundamental building block in the creation of fairer societies – where human rights are respected, democracy is strengthened and widely-shared prosperity is achieved. Ensuring better quality and more equal school systems will be critical to reversing the income and wealth inequality that is doing so much damage to societies and undermining national prosperity.

> *Save the Children believes we are now at a critical juncture: with the right decisions, level of ambition, and focus, our generation has the opportunity to fully realise the right to education: to ensure no child is excluded from school and every child in school is receiving a good quality education and learning.*

In this paper, we argue that setting an ambitious global learning goal, as part of a post-2015 development framework, will be crucial to realising this vision. It is, of course, only one element of the solution, but it will be an important one.

Our proposed focus for the goal, targets and framework post-2015 is grounded, in part, in an analysis of the social, demographic, economic and political changes that are shaping the wider world. Many of these forces are creating a very different context to that which existed in 2000 when the Millennium Development Goals were set. This report explores a number of these trends. Five of the most noteworthy have particular consequences for education post-2015:

- To help reduce damaging levels of income inequality in societies, post-2015 frameworks will need to focus on *reducing educational inequity*: this means equal opportunities to learn for all children, including the most marginalised.
- To respond to the growth and demands of the 'middle classes' in many countries, publically-funded education, whether delivered by the state or another provider, will need to *improve the quality of the education* provided.
- To respond to demographic changes and youth bulges, many countries will require a *new attention on young people*, but substantial focus will need to remain on basic education – ensuring widespread acquisition of basic skills remains critical to achieving shared economic growth.
- To recognise the critical role of civil society in demanding greater educational investment and improved quality in newly middle-income countries, a post-2015 framework will need to *help empower domestic civil society organisations.*
- To ensure millions of children affected by *humanitarian emergencies* are able to access a good quality education, the global humanitarian community and countries affected will need to plan efficiently, adopt innovative approaches and ensure education is adequately financed so that learning happens in every context.

As well as wider trends shaping the context and nature of the education challenge, the situation within schools' systems themselves has changed rapidly and will change further post-2015.

There is a global learning crisis with many poor quality schools and very worrying trends in learning, even in basic skills such as reading, writing and maths. Furthermore, it is the poorest and most marginalised who are most likely to be failed by poor quality schooling. Educational inequity remains a major issue; millions upon millions of children are still denied any real opportunity in life because of their gender, where they were born, or the income of their parents. While there has been some progress towards achieving gender equality in enrolment, much remains to be done. And inequalities along other lines – particularly between rich and poor – are often hidden, despite being large, deeply unjust and damaging for wider society.

We also now have a far better understanding of the complexities of achieving greater equality of opportunity. It cannot be something left to schools alone: Firstly, there is compelling evidence on the importance of a child's early years and ensuring that children start school ready to learn. And secondly, children learn and improve skills outside the classroom too, in their communities and informally. Furthermore, as well as continuing with a substantial focus on learning and equity in basic education, additional attention needs to be paid to young people, for example the 200 million 15 to 24 year-olds in low and middle-income countries that have missed out on completing primary school.

Based on an assessment of the trends shaping the wider world and the changing educational context, Save the Children has proposed a post-2015 framework that tackles both the clear exclusion of children being out of school and also the hidden exclusion of children being in school, but receiving a poor quality education. Our proposals, set out below, are underpinned by two core principles: **learning** and **equity**. An ambitious global goal could, just as the Millennium Development Goals have done, provide a framework for achieving the next big step in expanding global educational opportunity – ensuring all children benefit from a good quality education by being both in school and learning once there.

GOAL: BY 2030 WE WILL ENSURE ALL CHILDREN RECEIVE A GOOD QUALITY EDUCATION AND HAVE GOOD LEARNING OUTCOMES.

1. Ensure that girls and boys everywhere are achieving good learning outcomes by the age of 12 with gaps between the poorest and the richest significantly reduced.

2. Ensure that the poorest young children will be starting school ready to learn, with good levels of child development.

3. Ensure that young people everywhere have basic literacy and numeracy, technical and life skills to become active citizens with decent employment.

1 EDUCATION, INEQUALITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY: SAVE THE CHILDREN'S VISION

Expanding educational opportunity and delivering on every child's right to learn will be central to achieving Save the Children's wider vision for development. In this section we outline the enormous progress made in recent decades and argue that, based on this progress, we can now aspire to the ambitious goal of 'reaching zero' – with no child out of school or not learning once there.

1.1 THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS: THE NEED FOR CONTINUED PROGRESS

In 2000, the world came together to agree the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These represented an ambitious statement of countries' commitment to build a fairer world and to tackle the worst manifestations of poverty, deprivation and injustice. Education had a central role in the MDG framework. Its second goal focused on achieving universal primary education, setting the ambition of all children receiving a full course of primary schooling by 2015. And the third goal highlighted the importance of girls accessing primary school on par with boys to ensure broader gender equity. In the run up to the development of the MDGs, the education community themselves instigated the Education for All (EFA) goals and framework. This represented a broader set of ambitions on education that went beyond primary school access and included concerns about older children and school quality.[1] The two MDGs were drawn out of this wider Education for All process.

The education MDGs and EFA goals have played a significant role in facilitating progress over the last decade and a half. They have acted to galvanise the commitment amongst donors and governments alike to expand primary education. There has been an increase in the allocation of Overseas Development Aid (ODA) to basic education,[i] even if, as a percentage of overall ODA, education has remained relatively flat at around 12%.[2] And levels of domestic spending on education have increased substantially from 3.1% to 4.6% in low-income countries since 1999.[3] Although there continue to be large shortfalls – in one estimate about US$26 billion per annum for good quality basic education in low-income countries[4] – few can deny that progress, when assessed over the past decade, has been impressive.

- On access to basic education: in 1999 there were over 102 million children out of primary school; by 2010 that number had fallen to 61 million.
- On gender equity: the number of countries where girls faced "extreme disadvantage" (where fewer than 70 girls are in school for every 100 boys) fell from sixteen in 1990 to just one in 2010.
- At the country level: more governments have decided to focus on basic education and set ambitious goals that often go further than the MDGs. Many have, for example, increased children's legal entitlement to basic education from six to nine years.

This progress builds on an unprecedented expansion in access since the 1950s: 60 years ago, the average number of years of schooling in developing countries was just two years; this has *more than tripled* to 7.2 years.[5] None of this detracts from the scale of the remaining *access* challenge – half of out-of-school children live in conflict-affected fragile states still underprioritised by the international community. Before the 2015 deadline for the MDGs, we can and must continue to make progress on increasing school access.

However, looking ahead to 2015 and beyond, it is only because of the progress made in recent decades that we are now able to ask different questions and face up to a different set of challenges. This progress, the result of a

[i] In this document, 'primary education' is taken to mean school years 0-6, typically for children from the ages of 6/7 until 12/13. As more countries offer a nine-year phase of 'basic education', we sometimes use basic education to refer to the phase of learning which is compulsory. When talking about secondary education we are referring to schooling typically from the ages of 12/13 through to around 16. In contrast, 'post-basic education' refers to all educational phases after the period of compulsory free 'basic education' – this can include secondary, but also tertiary education.

combination of international effort and national level commitments, has enabled us to start asking how we can achieve the next stage: ensuring that all children can access education and learn basic skills once they are in school.

1.2 EDUCATION: CENTRAL TO A RENEWED VISION FOR DEVELOPMENT

It is critical to ensure that the right to education[ii] – a right to learn – remains centre stage in any post-2015 development framework, not only because it is an end in itself, but because it powerfully contributes to the creation of inclusive, fair and prosperous societies. Improved education is critical to achieving many other desirable goals.[6] Take just two examples of major current and future development challenges.

First, increasing levels of education will be a critical part of the response to climate change adaptation and population pressure. In part, this is about schools teaching children about climate change, its implications and how best to respond. But it is also more fundamental than that: education is one of the most effective interventions for reducing population growth and thereby lessening the strain on increasingly scarce natural resources.[7]

A second major challenge that is not high on wider development agendas is a concern for the quality of governance and democratic institutions.[8] Education is key to improving accountability, democracy and governance in developing and fragile states; a study in sub-Saharan Africa reported that people of voting age with primary education were 1.5 times more likely and those with secondary schooling 3 times more likely, to support democracy than those without an education.[9]

For Save the Children, one particularly critical link is between education and income or wealth inequality. Higher quality and fair school systems are critical to achieving Save the Children's wider vision for development – one that includes not just a focus on poverty, but also a more ambitious agenda to reverse damaging levels of inequality.[10] There is a growing consensus that inequality matters, not just for moral reasons, but also because high levels of income inequality have a range of corrosive effects on societies.

When the gap between the rich and poor is wide, social inclusion and the cohesiveness of societies are threatened.[11] The chances of forging greater equality of opportunity are also harmed as the poorest struggle to give their children the same advantages in life as others. And finally, high levels of inequality inhibit economic growth, reducing the efficiency of economies and undermining the institutions needed to sustain increases in prosperity.[12] That this last view is now held by the likes of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) demonstrates how concern for the negative impact of gross inequalities on societies is growing.[13]

Education is critical to responding to the challenge of inequality for a number of reasons. Firstly, in unequal societies, a fair and progressive education system – one that focuses particularly on supporting the poorest – helps counteract even deeply entrenched underlying inequalities of opportunity. Secondly, a more equal distribution of educational achievement is key to reducing income inequality. Many countries become more unequal as they develop. But this is emphatically not inevitable.

The experience of some East Asian countries, such as South Korea, shows that if countries invest in achieving equal educational opportunity and a fair distribution of 'human capital', then this has a major impact on wider inequalities. A World Bank report claimed that, in Brazil, it has been widely distributed improvements in skills that have helped to decrease inequality,[14] and in the South Korean context of the 1970s and 1980s, the OECD have concluded that 'education policy plays a key role in explaining Korea's (low) income inequality'.[15]

ii The key principles of the right to education – availability, acceptability, adaptability and accessibility- inform our approach to post-2015 education goals. The term 'right to learn' is used to highlight a current, pressing challenge in the full realisation of the right to education, though it should be understood in the context of all key inter-related aspects of the right to education, focused on guaranteeing free, universal primary education for all boys and girls.

1.3 A RENEWED VISION FOR EDUCATION: REACHING ZERO

Both because education is a hugely valuable end in itself and also due to its centrality in achieving a wider vision of a fair society, Save the Children believes that we should set ambitious education goals as part of a post-2015 framework. It is our generation that has, for the first time in history, the prospect of achieving not just universal access to basic education, but also universal learning – empowering and liberating schooling for every child on the planet. In other words, our generation has the chance of dramatically reducing inequalities by reaching zero in education – zero children out of school and zero children failed in learning by poor quality schools.

While the scale of the opportunity is significant, so too is the scale of the challenge. Realising the potential of education as a force for liberating talent, for forging both more prosperous and more equal societies, will require radical change and improvements in current school systems. For all the progress that has been made, we must be honest and open about how difficult it will be to achieve our vision. We need a clear understanding of two things:

- First, we need to understand how a rapidly changing world and major *external trends* are shaping the context within which school systems are developing and consider how they need to adapt accordingly.
- Second, we need to recognise that though we have made progress on access to basic education, there still remain problematic *internal trends* in education systems to contend with – most notably the recent stalling of progress on access, the interruption of education in crisis-affected contexts, the 'global learning crisis' and a continuing poor record on educational equity.

In the remainder of this paper we discuss both external and internal trends and then – in the light of this analysis – present our proposed post-2015 education and development framework.

2 EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN A CHANGING WORLD: EXTERNAL PRESSURES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In this section, we outline how some major trends shaping our world are having, and will increasingly have, profound effects on school systems in developing countries. We discuss changes in society, demographics, politics, economics and finally the effects of humanitarian emergencies. For each area the implications for schooling and in particular for a post-2015 framework, are discussed.

2.1 CHANGING SOCIETIES: THE GROWTH OF THE GLOBAL MIDDLE CLASS

The growth of the middle and 'vulnerable' classes

In many developing countries, the nature and aspirations of the communities that schools are serving are changing rapidly. Though millions of families and children remain condemned to poverty, many millions of families have also been lifted over the poverty threshold as countries steadily urbanise and grow. These families now belong either to the burgeoning middle class, generally defined as those on an income of approximately $10 to $50 a day, or to the 'vulnerable' or 'floating' class, those who earn somewhere between $2 and $10 a day and who hover just above the poverty line. For many in both these groups, this will be the first time that they have some regular disposable income and perhaps some personal experience of the value of education. These parents may be more likely to place a high value on educational opportunities for their children and to feel empowered to demand more of their children's schools.

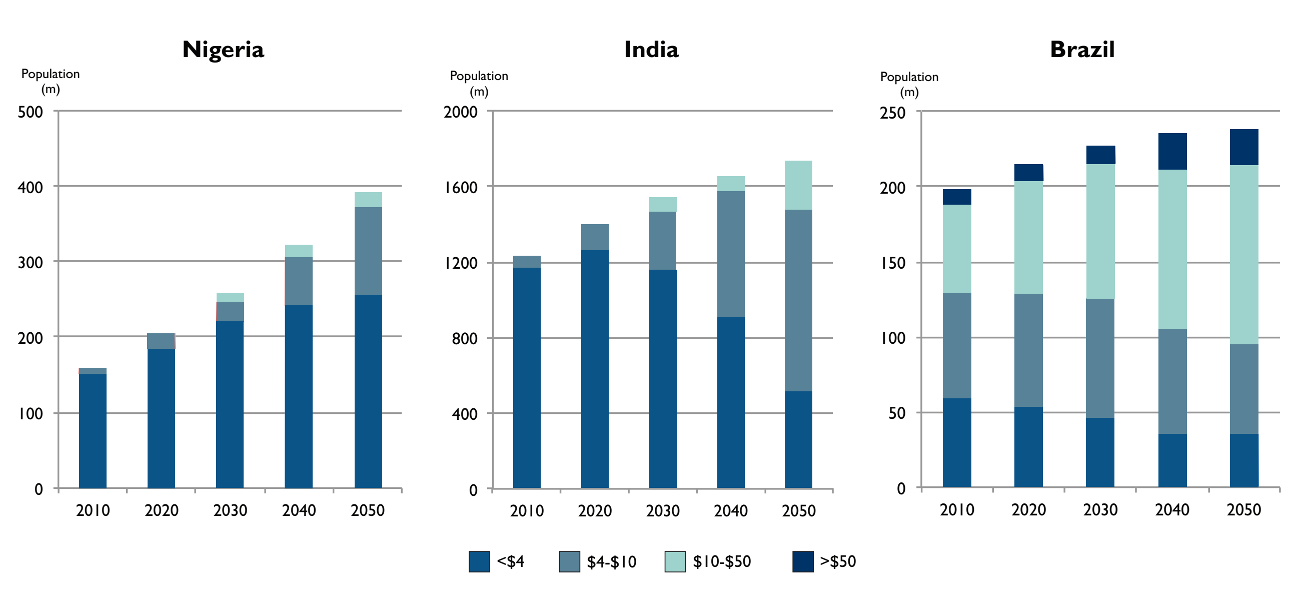
The trend of a growing global middle class is already evident in many countries and likely to increase in all regions of the world in the coming decades. For example, Latin American countries have witnessed a substantial expansion of their middle classes from about 15% of the population in 1992 to almost 30% of a much larger 2009 population.[16] And while growth of the middle classes in Africa and South Asia has been less pronounced, the prospects for future growth are substantial.[17]

A similar trend exists in the growth of 'vulnerable' households who have some potential for disposable income. No one can consider this group well off and indeed one of their defining characteristics is that they are not secure enough to avoid falling back into poverty. Nevertheless, they do represent a major shift in the nature of the communities that school systems need to serve.

Africa has already witnessed a substantial growth in the 'floating' and 'lower middle' classes,[iii] growing to make up about 34% of the population in 2010 from 26% in 1980.[18] And although India, for example, is currently projected to decrease by almost two thirds its population in under $4 poverty by 2050, over half of its population will then be 'vulnerable', earning only between $4-$10 per day (see Figure 1).[19] This trend is set to continue in all developing regions, with some projecting that we are fast approaching a world in which there will be about the same number of non-poor, vulnerable people in the world as those in poverty: both about 2 billion.[20] This seismic shift has significant implications for how we develop education policy.

iii In the referenced study, the middle class is identified as between $4-$20 per day and the 'vulnerable' class is $2-$4 per day. Naturally, significant variation exists across the continent; North African countries of Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt lead in proportional middle class size, whilst Liberia, Burundi and Rwanda have the smallest.

Figure 1. Projected changes in share of population by daily income bracket: Nigeria, India, Brazil



Source: Based on data from Birdsall, N., Lustig, N. and C. Meyer (2013 forthcoming). *'The New Poor in Latin America: Challenges and Risks'*. Center for Global Development: Working Paper.

The demand for better quality schools and increasing use of the private sector

The expansion of the 'vulnerable' and middle classes is something to celebrate and welcome; it also presents some great opportunities for education. Firstly, as larger groups of countries' populations move into higher income brackets, governments have an opportunity to strengthen their tax bases and so raise more domestic revenue to invest in continued expansion and improvement in basic services, including schools. Secondly, as highlighted in a number of studies, societies in which there is a larger middle class are more likely to have more progressive social policy on health and education as well as to make improvements in the quality of governance.[21]

Finally, the expansion of the 'vulnerable' and middle classes will potentially result in an increase in domestic demand both for expanded educational opportunity, particularly in post-basic education and for higher quality schooling. Parents could increasingly help put pressure on schools to improve; for example, education NGOs like Uwezo in East Africa and Pratham in India already deliver learning assessments and provide parents with clear information on school quality.[iv]

The growing 'vulnerable' and middle classes and the growth of fee-charging schools

However, the expansion of the 'vulnerable' and middle classes is also likely to lead to new pressures. It will potentially accelerate another trend in many developing world school systems: the expansion of fee-paying private schools, including low-fee private schools (LFPS).

In many areas there has already been a 'flight' to the private sector. In parts of India, Pakistan, Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana, LFPS make up a large and increasing proportion of enrolment. Even in rural India, 28% of primary school children are estimated to be in private schools, up from 18.7% in 2006. The figure is much higher in some Indian states, with private schools making up 68% of enrolment in Kerala, 59% in Punjab and 45% in Andhra Pradesh.[22] The figures in urban areas are even higher, with 78.9% of eight year-olds in private schools in urban areas compared to 31.2% in rural areas in Andhra Pradesh.[23] A similar trend exists in Africa, where enrolments in private primary schools have jumped

[iv] For further information on Uwezo see **www.uwezo.net**. On Pratham see **http://www.asercentre.org/.** Jangandoo, the sister organisation in Senegal, will conduct its first assessments in 2013.

approximately 10% from 2000-2008; in 7 African countries[v] over 30% of primary school pupils are enrolled in private schools.[24] The CEO of Pratham predicts a rapid increase in enrolment in private schools in India, stating that 'by the general election [in India] of 2019, 41% of all primary school students in India will be in private schools'.[25]

LFPS are found more often in urban areas, in part because state school systems can be very weak in informal settlements enabling entrepreneurs to benefit from the high level of disillusionment among families. Private school enrolments are particularly high in cities such as Lagos (where it has been estimated that 71% of children are in LFPS)[26] and Nairobi (where one estimate suggests the figure is over half.)[27] This implies that as countries urbanise further, pressure could increase to further expand LFPS. In the next 30 years, almost all the world's population growth will be in urban areas and two thirds of people in developing countries will be living in urban areas by 2050.[28]

Reaching the poor, but not the poorest?

Whether or not fee-charging schools are reaching the poorest of the poor or marginalised groups is debatable. Much country-level evidence points to the fact that low-caste children, girls, and children from the poorest households are all much less likely to be attending LFPS. Evidence from Kwara State, Nigeria suggests that many parents withdraw their children from school when they are unable to pay outstanding balances.[29] And for low-income families struggling with the costs of essential items, even parents who are able to afford to send one child to school may not be able to afford to send all children. In Andhra Pradesh, India, the presence of each additional older brother decreased a child's likelihood to attend a private school by 35 percentage points. The same study found that even boys from poorer families in rural areas were twice as likely to have attended a private school by age eight than girls.[30] Srivastava, P. (Ed.) (2013). *Low-fee Private Schooling: aggravating equity or mitigating disadvantage?* Oxford: Symposium Books.

It is governments' duty to provide good quality education for all children, in particular the most vulnerable in society. That means that increasing evidence on the failure of LFPS to reach some groups should be taken very seriously. It is an issue which needs to be better understood through additional research.

But overall, one of the most striking aspects of the expansion of fee-charging schools is that, while the poorest of the poor might not be able to opt out of poor quality, publically-funded schools, many very low-income parents are. The importance placed on education and the frustration with poor state provision means that many low-income families will make extraordinary sacrifices to find money for fees, even if it means going without in other areas or, in some cases, taking out substantial loans.[31] One mother in India said of parents like herself 'they are prepared to give up anything for the sake of their children's education… we spend everything on education'.[32]

While in some contexts it is the wealthiest in society who are withdrawing their children from state-funded schools, many people in the 'vulnerable class' are also making the decision to send their children to fee-paying schools. This raises the prospect that the social changes shaping many developing nations will lead to further significant flight from publically-funded schools.

Why equity and quality require a strong publically-funded school system

No one can criticise parents who decide to send their children to a private school. Parents will understandably send their children to what they regard as the best quality school that they can afford. Indeed, with the widespread continuation of informal 'fees' in many publically-funded schools, the decision is less difficult than might be imagined – public schools, in many contexts, are still not actually "free".[33] And too often governments struggling with poor governance and corruption have proved unable and/or unwilling to make crucial investment into, or reforms of, state school systems; teacher absenteeism, poor infrastructure and a lack of teaching and learning materials all plague many school systems.[34]

However, any significant continuation of the move away from publically-funded school systems presents two major risks for the future of school systems in developing countries.

- The first is a concern about inequality: as middle class parents and even those on relatively low incomes, take their children out of publically-funded schools, this leads to segregation and a poorer quality of education being provided in publically-funded 'sink schools'. This is a major concern as it will deny many children the right to

v Congo, Mauritius, Ghana, Guinea, Cameroon, Gambia, Madagascar.

a good quality education and exacerbate wider inequalities.

- The second is about investment to improve educational quality: when a publically-funded system delivers for a significant majority of parents this creates 'buy-in'. It provides the basis of a form of 'social contract' between the state and communities. In turn, this increases the chances of raising more domestic revenue through taxes to fund and continually improve schools. Given how such domestic revenue is likely to become more important in the future, it is critical to build the state's ability to provide a free, good quality education option for all children. In addition, increased domestic revenue can also help achieve equity goals, allowing governments to redistribute funding from households without children to those with children and from the rich to the poor (in a way which up-front fees make impossible).

Post-2015 implications: ambitious improvements to the quality of publically-funded schools

In the short to medium-term, privately funded education on a significant scale, including LFPS, is a reality which policy makers need to address and work with rather than ignore. For example, although many parents perceive private schools to be higher quality, this does not always seem to be the case. At a minimum, the quality is highly variable and some are very likely to be operating in unsafe environments. This makes the case for governments seeking, through regulation, to ensure minimum standards across privately and publically-funded schools.

We also need to be open to learning from innovations that are happening in the LFPS. Why do parents prefer these schools? How can the quality of publically-funded schools be improved so parents do not feel forced to make the choice to pay for their child's education? What is the impact on the poorest children?[35]

By far the most important implication for education post-2015 is the need to redouble efforts to improve the quality of publically-funded schools. Only by being bold in efforts to achieve this will we be able to respond to the risk that generations who have benefited from social mobility will opt out of publically-funded schools, further aggravating inequalities. Only by innovating within the publically-funded school system will governments and donors ensure that governments are not denied a potential ally, advocate and revenue source for improved state school systems. Indeed, part of this necessary innovation and radicalism may well involve the private sector providing schooling. As long as up-front fees are not charged, a degree of pragmatism about who provides schooling is needed.

The traditional model of publically-provided schooling is likely to and should remain, the backbone of most school systems, but there is a good case for exploring a wider range of different forms of provision in some contexts, from community-run schools and non-formal provision to privately-provided schools. So while there may be a range of different *providers*, the critical point is that the goal must be good quality publically-funded school systems.

Finally, given that the ultimate goal should remain a high quality, publically-funded education system, governments and donors will need to increasingly ask how best – over time – to bring privately-funded schools into the publically-funded system. India's Right to Education Act, which requires all privately-funded schools to offer a quarter of their places to the most marginalised students for free, is an example of moving in this direction. And, ultimately, it requires us to recognise the enormous demands to improve learning in publically-funded schools, whether provided by the state or by others.

Post-2015 implications: *The growth of 'vulnerable' and middle classes with disposable income and high demands for education has contributed to the emergence of fee-paying private schools in response to the poor quality in publically-funded schools. In many contexts, the expansion of fee-paying private schools may require short-term action, for example, through regulation of these schools. However, ultimately, any continued large-scale 'flight' into the private sector would undermine the publically-funded school systems with major equity implications. That is why it is critical that the post-2015 framework puts at its heart the improvement of publically-funded education systems.*

2.2 CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS: PUTTING PRESSURE ON BASIC EDUCATION FUNDING?

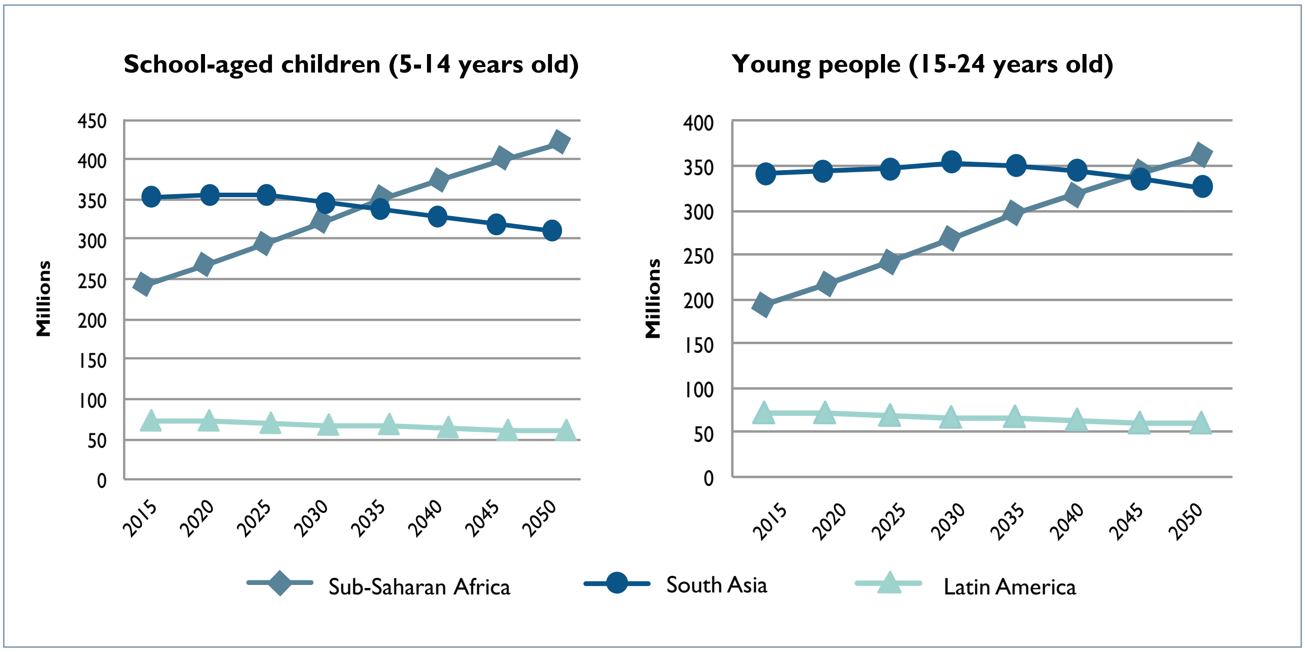
Youth bulges and the politics of expanding educational opportunity

Demographic trends in the coming decades will vary widely in different regions and countries. In some regions of the world they will create opportunities, but in others – notably Africa – they have the potential to create tensions and challenges. In order to achieve education for all, education policies will need to take into account these regional variations.

In the case of regions like Latin America, Asia Pacific and even South Asia, the demographics will be broadly helpful to achieving education for all, with stable or even falling numbers of both school-aged children (between 5 and 14) and young people (roughly 15-25). As Figure 2 below shows, Latin America and South Asia are both projected to see negative growth in both the school-aged and youth population between 2010 and 2020. Figure 2 also shows that Asia as a whole and Latin America are projected to have large, but stable populations of young people between the ages of 15 and 24. This is positive for these regions because it has the potential to allow for higher levels of per pupil spending on compulsory schooling without needing to increase overall education budgets. East Asian countries benefited from just such a demographic dividend in the 1970s and 1980s.

However, many of the least developed countries will face much more challenging contexts, raising major questions about how they will reconcile the twin demands of expanding post-basic education while also achieving universal primary school access and learning. Sub-Saharan Africa is likely to see a rapid increase in the school-age population from now until 2050 and beyond (see Figure 2). Already two-thirds of the African population are under 25,[36] and the future trends are stark: the central assumption of the UN is that the number of 15-24 year olds will climb from below 200 million in 2015 to in excess of 350 million in 2050.

Figure 2. Projected population of children and young people, 2015-2050



Source: Based on data from UN Population Statistics.
Note: Based on the "medium" scenario projected by the UN.

Basic education – the risk of not finishing the job we started

The previous section demonstrated that demographic change in many parts of the world will aid prospects for improving educational opportunities as stabilising or falling annual enrolments free up funds previously assigned to expanding access. However, in Africa, expanding cohorts of children and young people will continue to stretch available infrastructure and resources.

In this region, larger cohorts of children are likely to complete primary school, partly as a result of the success in expanding access to basic education, but also because of the continued growth in the size of each cohort of children. This will put considerable pressure on governments to expand secondary education and focus more public money on post-basic education. The major policy challenges will therefore be ensuring a fair expansion of opportunity to secondary and tertiary education, while at the same time accommodating increased demand for primary education, ensuring 100% access and improving the quality of basic education.

The potential cost implications of responding to these twin challenges are huge. If we assume an ideal of 95% of children finishing primary school, all of whom go on to lower secondary school in 33 sub-Saharan Africa countries[vi], school systems would have to serve 62.9 million children, over 4 times the 14.9 million children reached in 2005.[37] The shortage of funding every year from current levels would be $32.2 billion – today's $5.8 billion in aid to education would have to increase over fivefold to reach this amount.[38]

Governments faced with these competing demands will inevitably have to make difficult decisions. There is a risk that they will decide to respond to these demographic pressures by expanding post-basic education *at the expense* of a focus on achieving universal access and improving learning outcomes in primary education. This may happen for a number of reasons. Governments will be facing the very immediate pressure and concern about large number of unskilled and/or unemployed young people. It is also possible that the more powerful domestic voices with political influence are likely to be most concerned about post-basic education – and that comparatively less powerful groups, who would most directly benefit from a continued focus on basic education, will have less influence. Such a response would be understandable, but also short-sighted. Short-sighted not just because of the human rights commitments to achieve universal, compulsory basic education, but also because of the strength of the evidence that it is the quality of basic education which is absolutely critical for countries' future prosperity and not the number of years spent in school.[39]

None of this is to diminish the importance of a larger focus on post-basic education in the future as the next step in the progressive realisation of the right to education. As budgets come under pressure from the twin challenges listed above, there will be an increased onus on countries to explore new ways of expanding post-basic education. First, there is a long-standing argument for reallocating funding from higher education, which is often regressive.[40] Second, businesses benefit significantly from higher quality technical and vocational education (TVET) and should be expected to contribute significantly more in most countries, for example, in the form of on-the-job training and apprenticeships. Furthermore, policies to reduce youth unemployment have the potential to increase the domestic revenue base and therefore increase overall funding available for school systems.

Post-2015 implications: *The demographic pressures that many low-income, developing countries face will place twin stresses on their governments – to expand post-basic education and to ensure all children are learning in primary education. We propose a specific new target focused on young people, a group neglected by the MDGs, to recognise the challenge these countries will face. But given the potential risk of neglect of good quality primary education for all children, a post-2015 framework should maintain a substantial focus on basic education – to ensure that all children are in school and learning.*

vi For full explanation of trend calculation, please see Mingat et al. (2010).

2.3 CHANGING ECONOMIC CHALLENGES: THE GLOBAL QUEST FOR EQUITABLE GROWTH

A changing economic context

When the MDGs were developed, their focus was almost exclusively on social development, whether measured in terms of poverty or health and educational improvements. In 2015 and into the foreseeable future, many world leaders will now be more concerned about how a development framework can support the achievement of future prosperity. Developed countries are still recovering from the Great Recession. Some are predicting more gloomy economic prospects for the BRICS[vii] in the near future.[41] And while many low-income countries are achieving healthy growth rates, transformational economic change and achieving middle-income status remains a substantial challenge for many.

This cannot mean that education is seen in purely instrumental terms: that it is only of value because of its impact on other outcomes such as economic growth. A good quality education is rich and broad, helping children develop to their fullest potential with a range of cognitive and non-cognitive skills. But it also plays a critical part in improving the life chances of young people when they start to look for employment and it must also help countries secure future prosperity for all their citizens. Indeed, there is a virtuous circle with education providing an enabling environment for economic growth and economic growth supporting the fulfillment of the right to education. School systems need to be able to equip young people with the skills they need to succeed in tomorrow's labour market. While it is very difficult to predict the shape and nature of the future labour market, several trends stand out.

First, many developing world economies are going through a process of structural change with an expansion of non-agricultural sectors. This should not be over-stated – more than 200 million young people in sub-Saharan Africa are employed in agriculture, where they account for 65% of the total employment.[42] Additionally, the majority of employment opportunities in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America combined remain in the informal sector.[43] But there has been an expansion in the more productive sectors of economies, such as manufacturing and the service sector and a relative decline in agriculture across all developing country regions at varying levels.[44]

These expanding sectors and a modernising agricultural sector will both require a better educated labour force. In the case of agriculture, only 37% of agricultural employers find that their employees have been adequately prepared by their pre-hire education.[45] Sectors such as services are also areas where employers often judge the lack of workforce skills as an obstacle to growing their businesses.[46] A 2011 survey of employers reported that many had difficulty filling positions 'due to a lack of available talent': 67% of employers in India, 50% in Egypt, 32% in Botswana and 69% in Brazil.[47]

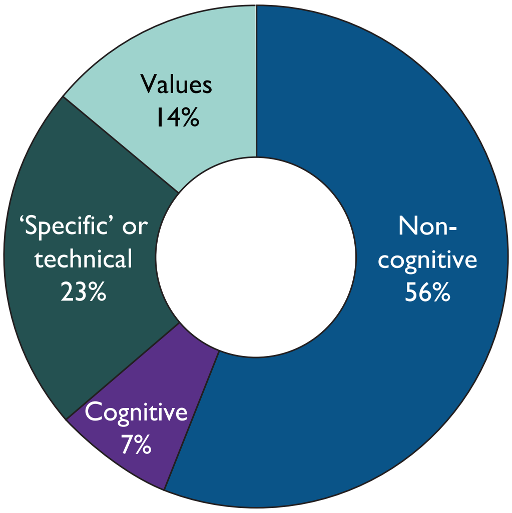
Second, economies will need to generate a large number of jobs in the future and strong education systems make up one crucial part of the enabling environment for economic growth and job creation. The World Bank estimates that 600 million more jobs will be needed globally in 2020 than in 2005 just to keep the employment rate constant; in sub-Saharan Africa, the number of jobs would have to increase by about 50%, requiring employment growth of 2.7% a year.[48] Globally, young people are about 3 times as likely as adults to be unemployed[49] and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) predicts sustained high unemployment levels until at least 2015.[50]

Third, the nature of the skills needed in the future is potentially very different from those demanded in the labour market today. Rapid technological change and the increased availability of mobile phones, internet and computing devices place greater importance on basic Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills for those in both formal and informal employment; one survey suggests that computer literacy is a fundamental skill for the majority of jobs, particularly in the OECD, but increasingly in developing countries as well.[51]

More and more, employers are highlighting the importance of non-cognitive skills like problem solving, creativity, communication and cooperation (see Figure 3). In fact, one study found that informal economy jobs required an even greater mastery of non-cognitive skills. Self-employed informal workers are often working along an entire value chain, requiring entrepreneurship, discipline, communication and confidence.[52]

[vii] The BRICS are Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Figure 3. Skills prioritised by employers surveyed in South Asia, (%)



Source: Based on data from Burnett, N. and S. Jayaram (2012). 'Skills for Employability in Africa and Asia.' Innovative Secondary Education for Skills Enhancement (ISESE): Results for Development.

It is essential, however, not to forget the importance of basic cognitive skills like reading, writing and arithmetic, which provide the foundation for other learning. Indeed, many employers surveyed in the same study emphasised the importance of 'learning to learn' and those surveyed in east and west Africa felt that schooling should deliver the fundamental skills while technical/specific training should take place on the job.[53] All children need to learn core skills in order to progress, both in school and in employment.

At the same time, national governments with different domestic contexts need the freedom and flexibility to respond to the changing nature of skill requirements within their economies. An effective post-2015 framework must capture outcomes that are important for all young people, but also leave a considerable degree of autonomy for national governments to respond to their particular circumstances or economic needs. That is why in our framework we propose global targets covering the core skills in primary school, which allow children to learn in other domains and minimum outcomes for young people to prepare them for adult life, but allow for national autonomy beyond this.

Achieving inclusive growth: the continued importance of basic education

Another important consideration in education and economic growth is that evidence and past experience suggests that if the objective is equitable growth, it is getting children into primary school and learning that matters most. The experience of East Asian countries, which grew rapidly and consistently from the late 1960s through to the early 1990s, demonstrates that high levels of investment in education are a critical factor in creating the enabling environment for sustainable and inclusive economic growth.[54] This experience showed that initial expansion of basic education, with attention to the quality of inputs into education, was critical; this was then rapidly followed by increased investment in secondary education. A World Bank report summed this up by saying that "Education policies that focused on primary and secondary education generated rapid increases in labour force skills".[55]

In recent academic literature, some have questioned the link between expanded educational opportunity and growth.[56] They point to the impressive increases in the average number of years in school, but no corresponding increase in productivity or economic prosperity. However, the lesson to draw from this is not that education is not important. Instead, the critical lesson is that ever more years of schooling is not enough if it is not accompanied by actual acquisition of skills. Indeed, the evidence remains strong that more children learning – particularly foundational skills – leads to growth. Expanding access and raising the quality of schooling has the potential to increase long-term growth by around 2% annually per capita, creating a powerful impetus for poverty reduction.[57]

Post-2015 implications: *Responding to the substantial future economic challenges will require delivery on every child's right to education. More attention will need to be paid to young people in many contexts, especially given the risk of high levels of youth unemployment in the coming decades. For many countries, young people and the expansion of secondary education will become their biggest focus in the coming years. But substantial attention of a global framework should remain on basic education – and increasingly be focused on the quality of that education. This is because it is this phase of education which, while not sufficient by itself, remains the crucial underpinning of any successful strategy to ensure inclusive economic growth.*

2.4 CHANGING BALANCE OF POWER: THE GEOGRAPHY OF EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

Middle-income countries and educational disadvantage

It is now well established that a growing number of the poorest people in the world live in what are officially classified as middle-income countries. Using the existing poverty line – $1.25 a day – just under three quarters of the poor live in middle-income countries; this is a monumental shift from two decades ago when the figure was just 10%.[58]
A similar pattern can be seen when looking at out-of-school children. As Figure 4 (next page) shows, the global share of out-of-school children in middle-income countries has almost tripled over the last two decades and almost halved in low-income countries.[59]

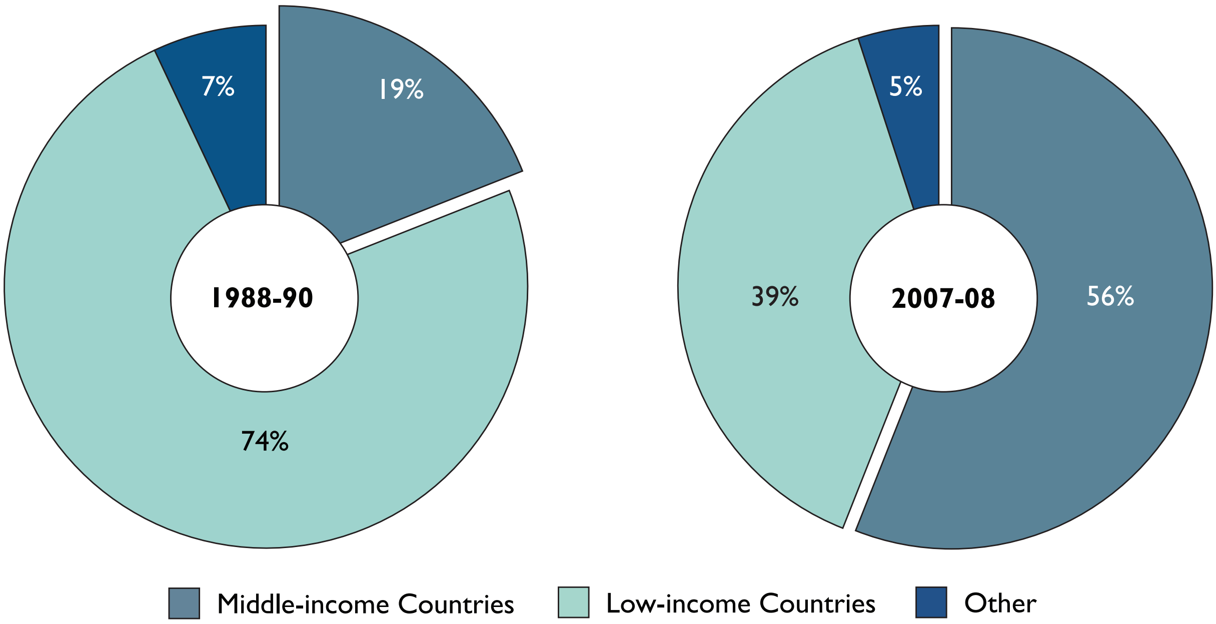
Achieving change in a new context

The changing geography of educational disadvantage will have major implications for how improvements are achieved in the future. For the countries that remain low-income, often with very poor governance, aid must continue to play a major role. Indeed, in countries such as Mali, aid represented over 25% of education spending in the period from 2004-2010 – impressive expansions of access to school have only been possible because of aid and any strategy to substantially improve learning outcomes in the future will continue to rely on ODA.[60] The scale of the challenges in these countries is such that existing aid levels continue to be too low and the need to spend aid more effectively remains imperative.

However, in many middle-income countries – where over half of all out-of-school children now live – aid will play a diminishing role in the future and developing alternative and efficient strategies of domestic financing will be vital. There are two implications in particular. First, national political ideas and forces will increasingly shape national agendas – with less space for international pressure in areas where governments no longer need or receive financial support. Children, parents and communities will need to feel empowered to demand provision of schooling themselves. Stronger action by domestic civil society organisations will be crucial in ensuring governments are accountable for their education agendas, in particular, providing a bridge between the poorest and the government. Secondly, in the absence of aid, the international community will need to rethink its strategies on how best to partner with governments to ensure global commitments on the right to education for all children are met, effectively reaching the poorest children.

Post-2015 implications: *The changing geography of educational disadvantage will result in a decline in the importance of aid in some countries. In these contexts, national level policy decisions and the action of civil society within each country will be more critical; and as a result the post-2015 global framework must empower civil society organisations around the world, helping them to hold their governments to account when children's right to education is denied.*

Figure 4. Estimates of the change in global distribution of the world's poor by millions of children not in primary school, 1988-90 versus 2007-08



Source: Based on data from Sumner, A. (2010). 'Global Poverty and the New Bottom Billion: Three-quarters of the World's Poor Live in Middle-income Countries' IDS Working Paper 349.

Note: Data for both India and China were unavailable for one of the comparison years.

2.5 ON-GOING CHALLENGES: EDUCATION IN HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

In addition to the big changes outlined so far in this section, there are several other significant trends that are affecting and will continue to affect, the context for the poorest countries in particular.

In this section we consider climate change, natural disasters and conflict and argue that, while the specific impact that they each have will be different, they have similar overall implications for thinking about a post-2015 development framework. They are examples of how the context within which education needs to be delivered will continue to differ widely from country to country. As such, they point to the need for a framework that focuses more on outcomes than inputs and allows for greater flexibility and innovation at the national and local level.

Climate change, natural hazards and disasters: impact on schooling

Natural disasters are predicted to affect 175 million children each year in the coming decade, a 40% increase from 1995-2005.[61] The impact of these crises is often felt most acutely in the poorest countries and children's education can be profoundly disrupted as schools and materials are damaged, students and teachers displaced, and schools used as shelters. Save the Children's experience indicates that the longer a child is out of school, the less likely he/she is to return.[62] Therefore, these crises have the potential not just to pause a child's schooling, but also to undermine the education of an entire generation of children in affected communities, reversing past gains toward development goals.

Some countries face particularly dire scenarios due to climate change. Worst-case scenarios on climate change estimate that millions of inhabitants could be temporarily displaced by individual extreme weather events.[63] The effects of climate change will render a number of lands uninhabitable, for example, several Small Island Developing States will be no longer inhabitable beyond 2050.[64] Preparing the youngest populations in the most at-risk countries for resulting pressures to migrate requires sound climate change-related strategies that prioritise education and address knowledge and skills transfer.

Investment in education is one of the most effective environmental policies.[65] This is highlighted in one rigorous study that shows that investment in education (alongside family planning measures leading to lower birth rates and reduced population pressures) was better value for money than, for example, a shift to nuclear power or renewable energy options. This was the case in 80 of the 88 countries that this study assessed.[66] The overall conclusion reached was that there was even a case for re-routing funding intended to support climate change mitigation or to help change energy mixes in countries (for example, moving to nuclear) into education.

In light of the short and long term threats to education posed by climate change, the post-2015 framework should aim to protect children's education by encouraging national innovation to ensure that systems have strong contingency and disaster preparedness plans in place. These should aim to prevent or minimise disruptions to education and to restore education as quickly as possible following large-scale natural disasters. This also includes recognising the critical role a relevant curriculum can play in teaching children the science of climate change and the long term impacts of environmental destruction when applied to their daily lives. Education plays a key role in ensuring children and their families can cope and protect themselves when natural hazards strike.

Continuity and change with conflict

Coinciding with the end of the Cold War, recent decades have seen a sharp decline in the number of conflicts, especially the number of civil wars, but also the number of international armed conflicts.[67] However, the decline should not be taken to mean that the effects of conflict will be any less dire or disruptive in the future. Indeed, a large number of prolonged internal armed conflicts continue.[68] This type of conflict is often low to medium in intensity, averaging 12 years in length,[69] and flares up and down suddenly. In most cases, these conflicts have a disproportionate impact on civilians – a pattern that can have particularly grave consequences for children, disrupting their education.

Education is particularly at risk given the growing number of attacks or threats of attack against schools and education facilities, teachers and pupils. Since mid-2007, over 30 countries have experienced a pattern of targeted attacks on schools, teachers and students.[70] Moreover, the military use and occupation of schools by armed forces remains a damaging practice in many of these countries.[71]

There is also evidence that educational disadvantage (measured in terms of out-of-school children) remains concentrated in conflict-affected fragile states. In 2010, global figures estimated that 28 million children were out of school in conflict-affected fragile states, representing almost half of the world's out-of-school population.[72] And when we consider the continued fragility and potential instability in many regions of the world, highlighted just recently by the flare up of conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Syria, among others, it is highly likely that on-going and new internal armed conflicts will continue to affect large numbers of children.

Responding to local context

The significance and impact of conflict or a natural disaster on children's education will differ from context to context. Adapting the school curriculum can be a core part of seeking to increase the resilience of a country, for example including lessons on disaster risk reduction. In a context where underlying historic ethnic tensions can lead to potential conflict and even civil war, the school curriculum can help to build bridges and trust and to prevent tension, particularly by ensuring that historical or political lessons do not legitimise or favour a particular group.

The effects of conflict and natural disasters have an impact not only on what is taught, but also how it is taught. Sometimes, the response may require some significant innovation in non-formal education provision over formal, school-based learning. In some conflict-affected countries, for example, links with religious or civil society educational providers – for example that provided by Integrated Qur'anic Schools – maybe the best way of ensuring that schooling is resilient and sustainable. A striking example can be found in Somalia, where the formal schooling system has collapsed, while traditional, non-formal education has proved incredibly resilient.[73]

Guaranteeing that children can continue to go to school throughout a conflict ensures not only that an entire generation of children is not missing out on their right to education, but also that the disillusionment caused by underemployment and lack of opportunity for unskilled youth does not perpetuate conflict and instability. But exactly what form of preventative educational intervention is needed, or indeed viable, will be vastly different in different contexts. The same goes for natural hazards: improving communities' ability to cope with and reduce the risk of crises in a region prone to drought will require children to be taught different skills than those in a flood-affected region.

Ensuring that children are not denied their right to education because they live in a conflict-affected country or in an area battered by natural disasters will require a global framework which ensures that no child is forgotten. It will mean setting clear national ambitions for each and every child. However, it must also mean giving local communities significant autonomy to respond to their particular contexts. A global framework can set the key outcomes, but often the actual form of delivery will require local insight, innovation and flexibility.

***Post-2015 implications:** It is likely that conflict and natural disasters will continue to prevent millions of children from accessing a good quality education. Many countries will need to plan, protect and adopt innovative approaches to secure education progress made over the years and ensure all children continue to learn, regardless of the context. Responding to humanitarian emergencies will need to be seen as a joint responsibility of the education, development and humanitarian communities – which will need to guarantee it is adequately funded and supported in any crises.*

2.6 KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

In this section, we have discussed a number of global changes that are profoundly affecting the context in which we think about education and development. We charted the implications of the rise of the global middle class, the demographic trends affecting different regions, the demands of creating inclusive growth in changing economies, the shift in the distribution of educational disadvantage and the continuing challenges of emergencies, climate change and conflict. Key implications for the post-2015 thinking and framework have been drawn out throughout the section. They can be summarised as follows:

- To respond to the growth and demands of the 'middle classes' in many countries, publically-funded education, whether delivered by the state or another provider, will need to *improve the quality of the education* provided.
- To respond to demographic changes and youth bulges, many countries will require a *new attention on young people*, but substantial focus will need to remain on basic education – ensuring widespread acquisition of basic skills remains critical to achieving shared economic growth.
- To recognise the critical role of civil society in demanding greater educational investment and improved quality in newly middle-income countries, a post-2015 framework will need to *help empower domestic civil society organisations*.
- To ensure millions of children affected by *humanitarian emergencies* are able to access a good quality education, the global humanitarian community and countries affected will need to plan efficiently, adopt innovative approaches and ensure education is adequately financed so that learning happens in every context.

3 A CHANGING EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT: LEARNING AND EQUITY WITHIN THE SYSTEM

In the previous section we assessed some of the trends outside the education system that will have important implications for the future of schooling post-2015. In this section we turn to some key recent trends within education and consider their implications.

3.1 THE GREAT SLOWDOWN: EDUCATIONAL ACCESS IS HEADING BACKWARDS

Great progress was made in improving access to primary school at the beginning of the millennium, but this progress has now stalled and is even reversing in parts of Africa. One report estimated that if current trends continue, 2 million more African children will be out of school in 2015 than in 2010 and the number of out-of-school children has already increased by 1.6 million from 2008 to 2010.[74] In some countries, this situation is particularly acute. For example, in Nigeria, the number of children out-of-school increased from 7.1 million in 2004 to 10.5 million in 2010,[75] partly due to a fall in the primary enrolment rate from 65% to 58% in the same period.[76] Although demographic changes are part of the explanation, they are not the only factor; in Nigeria, 800,000 fewer children were enrolled in 2010 than in 2006.[77]

Reversing these worrying trends and achieving universal access to basic education will require action on a number of fronts. One particular challenge is that many of the groups still likely to be out-of-school face specific barriers to accessing education, whether it be living in conflict-affected fragile states, experiencing frequent natural disasters, being forced into child labour, marrying too young, experiencing disability, or living on the street.[78] Ensuring these children are not denied an education will require more tailored and specific attention.

However, it is increasingly clear that there is an additional barrier to achieving universal access, one that affects all children, not just the most vulnerable groups: the poor quality of schooling and low levels of learning. Some parents are either deciding against sending their children to school in the first place, or, once there, disappointment with poor quality learning is leading some children to drop out.[79]

3.2 THE GLOBAL EDUCATION CHALLENGE: ACHIEVING ACCESS WITH LEARNING

Our understanding of a good quality education is that children leave school with a wide range of skills relevant to their country's context and cultures that will enable them to succeed, prosper and thrive to their greatest potential. All countries, whether low- or high-income, struggle to define and deliver this set of skills, but it is nevertheless right that it remains the ultimate goal of any school system.

It is clear that this vision of a good quality education is about much more than the core skills of literacy and numeracy. Firstly, it has always been the case that, while learning core skills is prioritised early in a child's education, children should increasingly be using these core skills to access wider and richer learning as they progress through school. But secondly, there is rightly a growing focus on a range of other skills that may become more relevant in the modern world: skills such as entrepreneurship, critical thinking, discipline, communication and self-confidence.

Many countries, particularly those classified as middle-income, are asking themselves new questions about how to ensure their children are prepared to participate both domestically and internationally in a 21st century globalised labour market. This is particularly the case where the quality of basic education is already reasonably high – for example in East Asia.[80]

However, both a deep commitment to the value of a broader education and looking to innovate to boost '21st century skills' – which will vary from country to country – should not be seen as inconsistent with a focus on foundational skills such as literacy and numeracy. These will remain critical for children's development and progression in school. Children facing hidden exclusion – who are in school but lack these basic skills – will find it increasingly difficult to keep up, may become disillusioned and frustrated, fall into cycles of continually repeating years, and eventually drop out of school entirely. The failures of school systems to teach these essential skills effectively and to provide quality learning opportunities in a safe and encouraging environment threatens to undermine the value placed on schooling both now and in the future. Achieving the wider vision of education will require radical improvements in the teaching of such foundational skills in many countries.

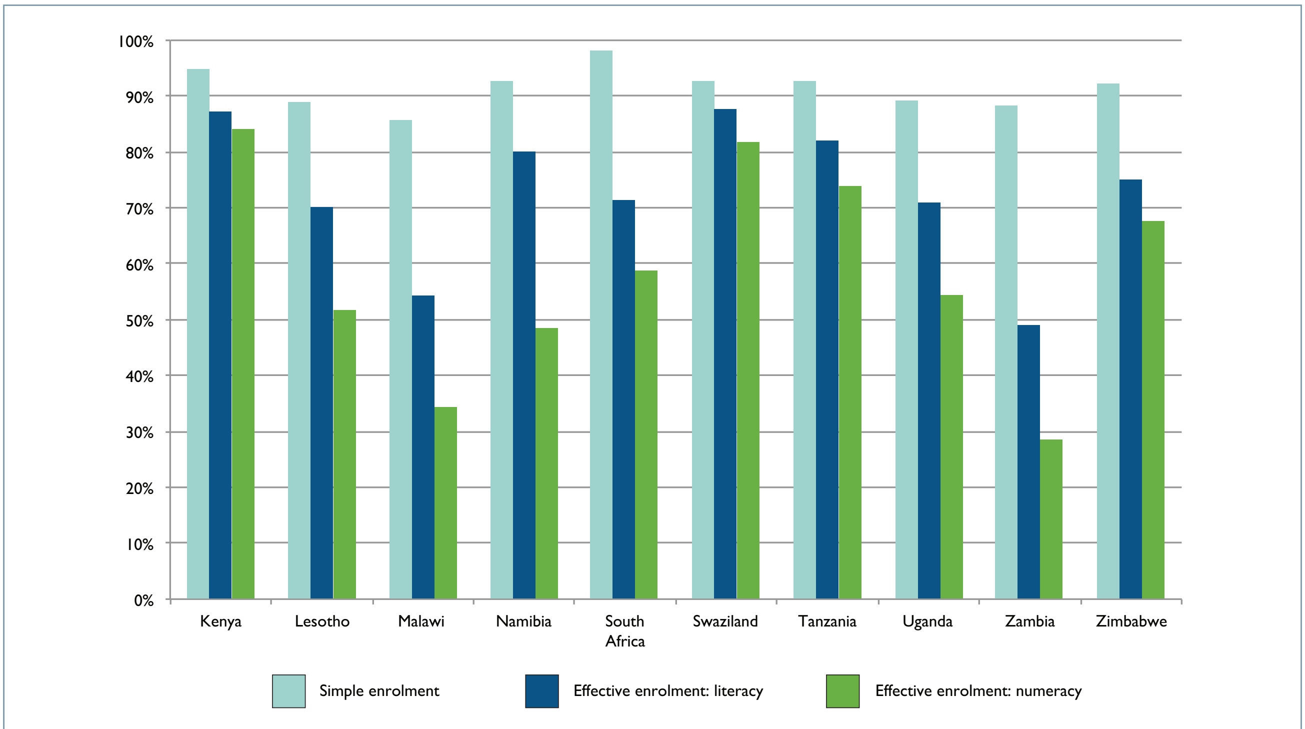
3.3 THE GROWING EVIDENCE ON THE LEARNING CRISIS

A mounting body of evidence shows that a crisis of 'hidden exclusion' is failing children around the globe. The 2012 Global Monitoring Report for Education for All estimates that 250 million children of primary school age are either not in school, have dropped out by grade 4, or are in school and not learning basic skills like literacy and numeracy – that is almost 40% of the total number of primary school-aged children globally.[81]

In some regions, the situation is even worse. The Brookings Institution's Africa Learning Barometer estimates that only half of Africa's nearly 128 million primary school-aged children will both attend school and learn basic skills. One study from Stellenbosch University compared straightforward enrolment rates (the 'simple' assessment of whether children are in school) to a calculated 'effective' enrolment rate (of children who are both in school and learning at the appropriate level).[82] The results are striking – even in a country like South Africa where enrolment rates are 98%, the effective enrolment rate of children both in school and learning (literacy) is only 71%. In some countries the gaps are even larger, particularly when looking at numeracy. In Malawi, for example, over 80% are enrolled on the 'simple' measure, but almost as few as 30% of children are 'effectively' enrolled.

Figure 5 below shows the difference between the 'simple' and 'effective' enrolment rates for literacy and numeracy in 10 eastern and southern African countries. The gap between these rates show the appalling number of children suffering from hidden exclusion. The figures become starker still when you compare poorer children to richer children – an issue discussed further in section 3.5.

Figure 5. 'Simple' versus 'effective' enrolment in literacy and numeracy of Grade 6-aged students in select eastern and southern African countries



Source: Based on data from Spaull and Taylor (2012). 'Effective enrolment' Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers 21/12.

3.4 GOING BACKWARDS IN LEARNING

If such statistics were not worrying enough, there is evidence that in some countries school quality may have actually decreased in recent years from already low levels.

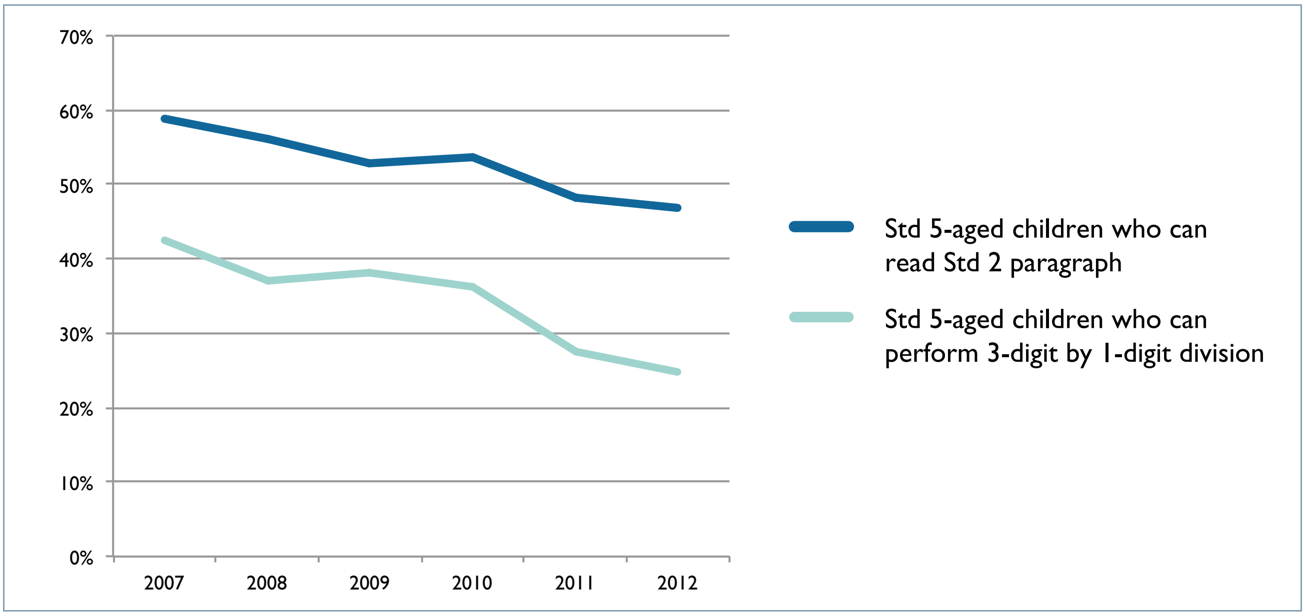
Looking at the data on learning outcomes achieved by *children in schools*, there are a large number of countries that are performing poorly; learning assessment results are stagnating or even getting worse. Assessments of countries participating in either the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) assessments or the West Africa-focussed Program on the Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC) demonstrate this. Of the 14 countries participating in the SACMEQ assessments, six achieved poorer aggregate scores on reading in 2007 than they had in the previous 7-12 years.[83]

It is important to recognise that these assessments are 'school based' and will only capture learning levels of students enrolled in school. This means that an observed decline in performance of in-school children could in part be due to recent increases in access, with previously out-of-school children with challenging socio-economic factors performing worse than average. So while surveys like SACMEQ and PASEC clearly highlight the enormous scale of the learning challenge and show *schools'* results regressing, they do not necessarily show lower levels of learning for *children overall*.

Other surveys, while they cover fewer countries, do allow a comparison of performance of all children, both in and out of school. In Ethiopia between 2002-2009, literacy rates fell for the poorest children: a child from the richest households is now almost 20 times more likely to be literate than the poorest children.[84]

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) assessment and monitoring project in India has been measuring the learning of over 700,000 children both in and out of school each year since 2005.[viii] The findings in their 2012 Annual Report make for worrying reading. The number of children in Standard 5 level (approximately 10-11 years old) who can read a simple paragraph decreased by over 10% in the 6 years from 2007-2012, while Standard 5-aged children who could perform division went down by almost 20% (see Figure 6).[85] In the case of India, the explanation for the decline in learning outcomes being due to an expansion of enrolment – with more children who have never been to school admitted for the first time – does not hold true: even accounting for this, the absolute levels of learning are declining.[86]

Figure 6. Percentage of Standard 5-aged children who can read a paragraph and perform division



Source: Based on data from ASER (2012). *Annual Status of Education Report (Rural).*

viii In India, there are very high levels of enrolment amongst primary and lower secondary school-aged children. Over 96% of children have been enrolled in each of the past four years. In recent years the proportion of out-of-school children has actually slightly increased: nationally the proportion of 6-14 year olds not enrolled in school has increased from 3.3% in 2011 to 3.5% in 2012 (ASER 2012, p 47).

So, as access has increased, part of the challenge has been that schools are now teaching more children with poorer nutrition, lower levels of parental education and greater pressures to work in addition to attending school. But this appears to be only one part of the issue. The other critical challenge is that as school systems have expanded, too little attention has been paid to the quality of education being provided.

In part, because the current education MDG only talks about access and enrolment, expansions in enrolments have not been followed by expansions in resources at levels needed to ensure quality is protected, let alone enhanced. In Ghana, for example, while total real public expenditure on basic education has increased dramatically, increases in enrolments due to demographic changes, the abolishment of school fees and their replacement with capitation grants have meant that per-pupil expenditure has seen very little, if any, increase.[87] In Kenya, per-pupil resources available in government schools decreased by approximately 15% after school fees were abolished.[88] In Ethiopia, per-pupil expenditure fell by 20% between 1994-2004 for the same reason.[89]

With rising enrolments and class sizes, there is constant pressure on teachers as well as a persistent demand for new teachers. Moreover, the resulting rapid teacher recruitment has meant that some teachers are hugely underqualified. One study in Nigeria of over 19,000 state school teachers found that only 0.4% had the minimum knowledge and capability to teach English and maths to Grade 4 students.[90] Strong evidence suggests that the quality of teachers is critical to delivering improvements in children's learning.[91]

However, we must not be pessimistic: gains in access and quality are achievable in most low- and middle-income countries, particularly with improved governance of school systems and renewed commitment to education. Tanzania, Swaziland and Namibia, for example, have all increased enrolment in primary schools whilst improving learning outcomes significantly.[92] Tanzania increased primary enrolment from 49% to 98% in just 10 years from 1999-2008; from 2000-2007 it halved the proportion of functionally illiterate 10-11 year olds and achieved the highest scores in literacy of all SACMEQ countries.[93] Not coincidentally, Tanzania also increased education spending from just 2% of GDP in 1999 to 6.2% of GDP in 2010, one of the greatest increases of low- and middle-income countries.[94] It is time for us to build on the gains made in universal access by focusing on learning and quality so that not only are all children in school, but they are also learning once there.

Post-2015 implications: *Learning is about more than reading and writing. But these skills are critical both as a pathway to more advanced learning and also as essential skills in themselves – literacy is tied to a wide range of positive outcomes in life. The post-2015 development framework must provide a focus on such foundational or basic skills, while also accommodating and supporting the achievement of a broader definition of what represents a good quality, fulfilling education.*

3.5 CHANGING PATTERNS OF EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY

A second key challenge which must be addressed by the post-2015 development framework is the high and, in some cases, growing level of educational inequality within countries. It is central to any conception of fairness and equal opportunity that in all countries every child has a good chance in life irrespective of his/her background or gender. Where this is not the case and educational inequality exists there are, as we saw in section one, negative implications for overall income equality and the prospects for increased national prosperity. Furthermore, there is strong evidence from the developed world that the more equitable education systems are also the higher performing systems.[95]

Progress on gender inequalities, but challenges remain

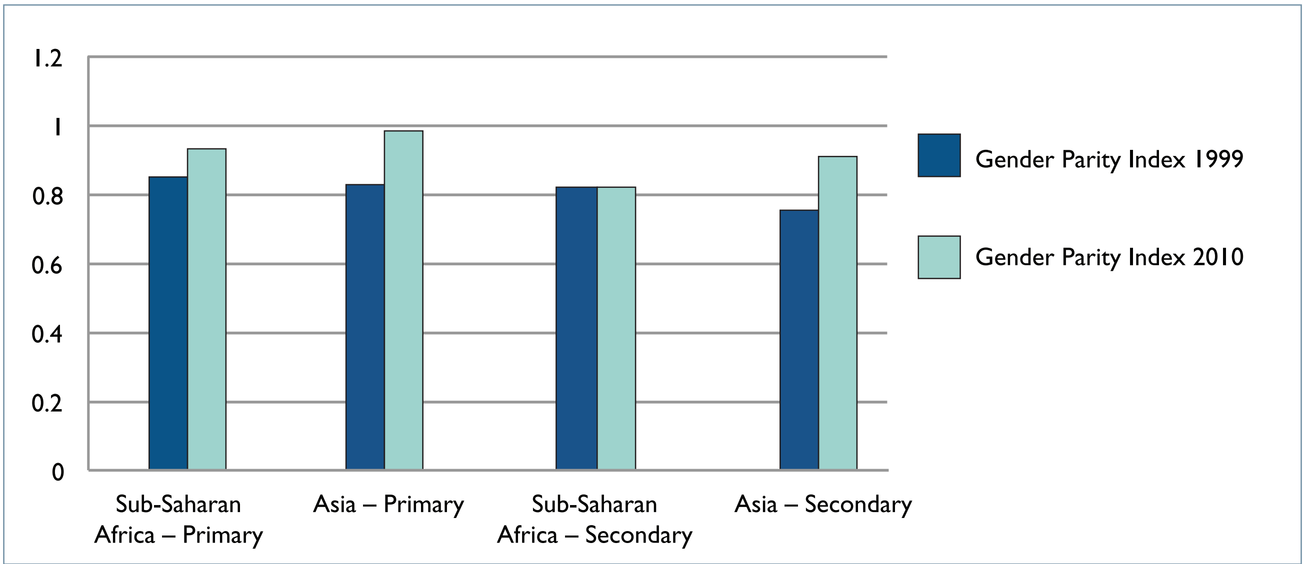
The existing MDG framework, as well as the wider EFA framework, has focused on gender inequality, which is likely to have been one of the factors behind the impressive improvements in these measures over the past decade. Section one stated that the number of countries with 'extreme' gender disadvantage – when 70 or fewer girls are in school for every 100 boys – has fallen to just one in 2010 (Afghanistan). Additionally, there has been a fall in 'severe' disadvantage, which refers to countries where only 90 girls are in school for every 100 boys; 33 countries fell below this threshold in 1999, compared with just 17 in 2010.[96] In order to maintain and build on this progress, the current focus on gender inequalities needs to be developed further in two ways.

First, there is a strong case for developing a greater focus on inequalities in secondary school in both enrolment and progression. The chart below shows that, when looking at primary education, there have been impressive improvements in the Gender Parity Index.[ix] But in Africa, the picture is very different when it comes to secondary education – across the region, the ratio has not shifted at all since 1999 (see Figure 7). In some countries, such as Kenya, gender parity has gone backwards. As well as the human rights arguments for focusing on girls during secondary education, there is a more instrumental case: ensuring that more girls receive at least some secondary education is crucial given the evidence of the wider benefits of learning for girls. Educating girls has a direct link to equitable economic prosperity and growth as well as child health.

One estimate suggests that if all sub-Saharan African mothers attained at least some secondary education, then there would be 1.8 million fewer child deaths each year.[97] Similar positive links have been made to maternal health, early marriage and nutrition.[98]

Secondly, in the coming decades, the focus on gender will need to continue to be guided by international commitments whilst accounting for contextualised efforts, relevant to local circumstances. We have already seen that in some countries equity in primary school enrolment will remain a problem, while in others, secondary schools should be the focus. However, the evidence also suggests that in some countries, for example in Latin America and some South Asian countries such as Bangladesh, it is boys who are disadvantaged.[99]

Figure 7. Gender Parity Index: Trends in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia in Primary and Secondary



Source: Based on UIS data. Accessed January 2013.
Note: Asia refers to south and west Asia.

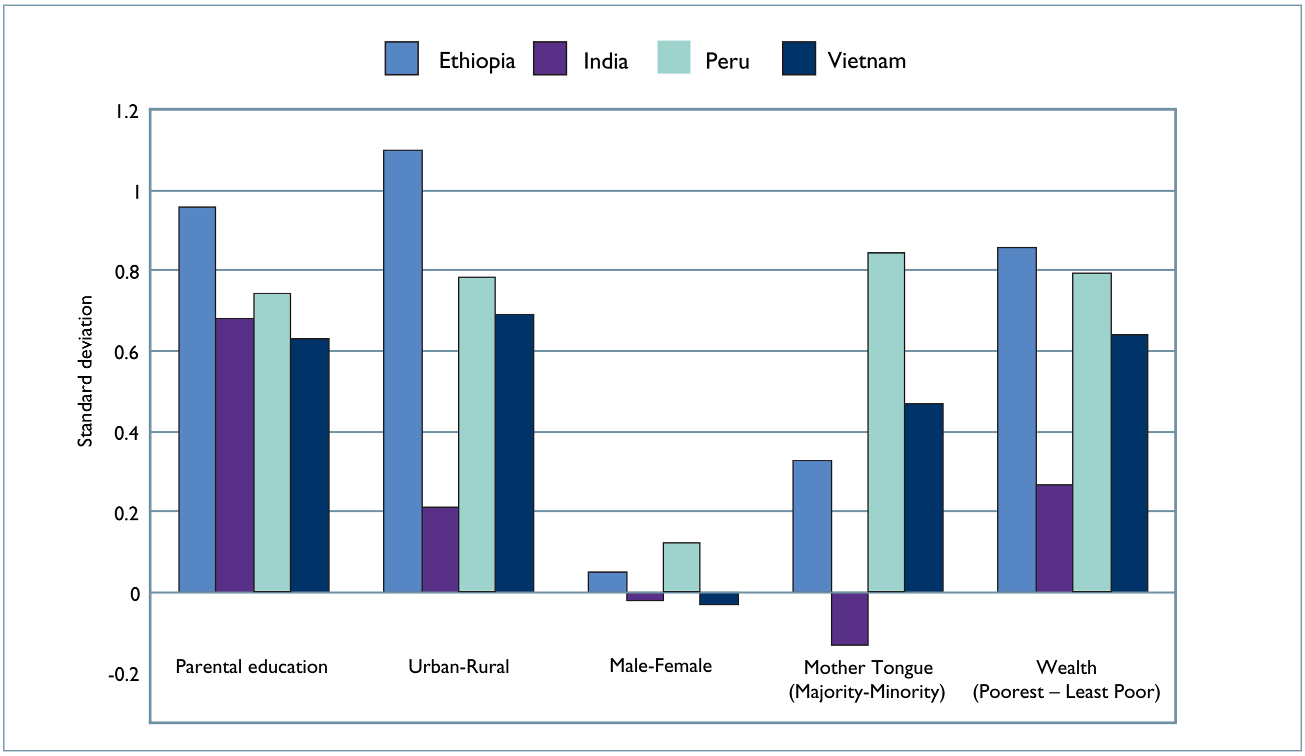
Beyond gender: deepening the equity focus

The current international development frameworks only focused on one dimension of inequality: gender. Looking at inequality through such a narrow lens has shown what a difference can be made when global targets are broken down. But we now need to learn the lessons from the focus on gender and go further. Only focusing on girls is insufficient because many other inequalities are detrimental to countries' future prospects. Indeed, there are other inequalities which, in many instances, are starker than those between girls and boys. The most notable of these are the different educational opportunities for the poorest versus the best-off children and between those from urban and rural areas. In particular, poor children are consistently and substantially disadvantaged in all countries. This is particularly the case when looking at actual learning, rather than simply enrolment and progression.

ix Gender Parity Index shows the number of girls in school for every boy, where 1 means parity and, for example, 0.8 means that for every 100 boys in school there are just 80 girls.

Results from the Young Lives[x] study show that across Peru, Ethiopia, Vietnam and India (Andhra Pradesh), children from wealthier households, from urban areas and with better educated parents all achieved higher scores in mathematics at the age of eight when compared to those in rural areas and those from households with low parental education levels.[100] This can be seen in Figure 8 below. This shows that the inequalities along non-gender lines can be significant, with standard deviations[xi] in many cases between 0.6 and 1. In contrast, the gender disparities in these countries are modest and in the cases of Vietnam and India actually favour girls, albeit very slightly.

Figure 8. Gaps in mathematics achievement between groups of children, age 8 (2009)



Source: Murray (2012). 'Is school education breaking the cycle of poverty for children?' Young Lives study: University of Oxford.

Similar findings can be seen when looking at learning assessment data from southern and eastern African countries. In the figure below, 'effective enrolment rates' – when children are in school and learning – are compared along different dimensions of inequality. It reveals some noteworthy findings in effective enrolment for literacy: in most countries, the gender gaps are narrow,[xii] whereas the gaps between wealthy and poor children and between urban and rural children are very wide.

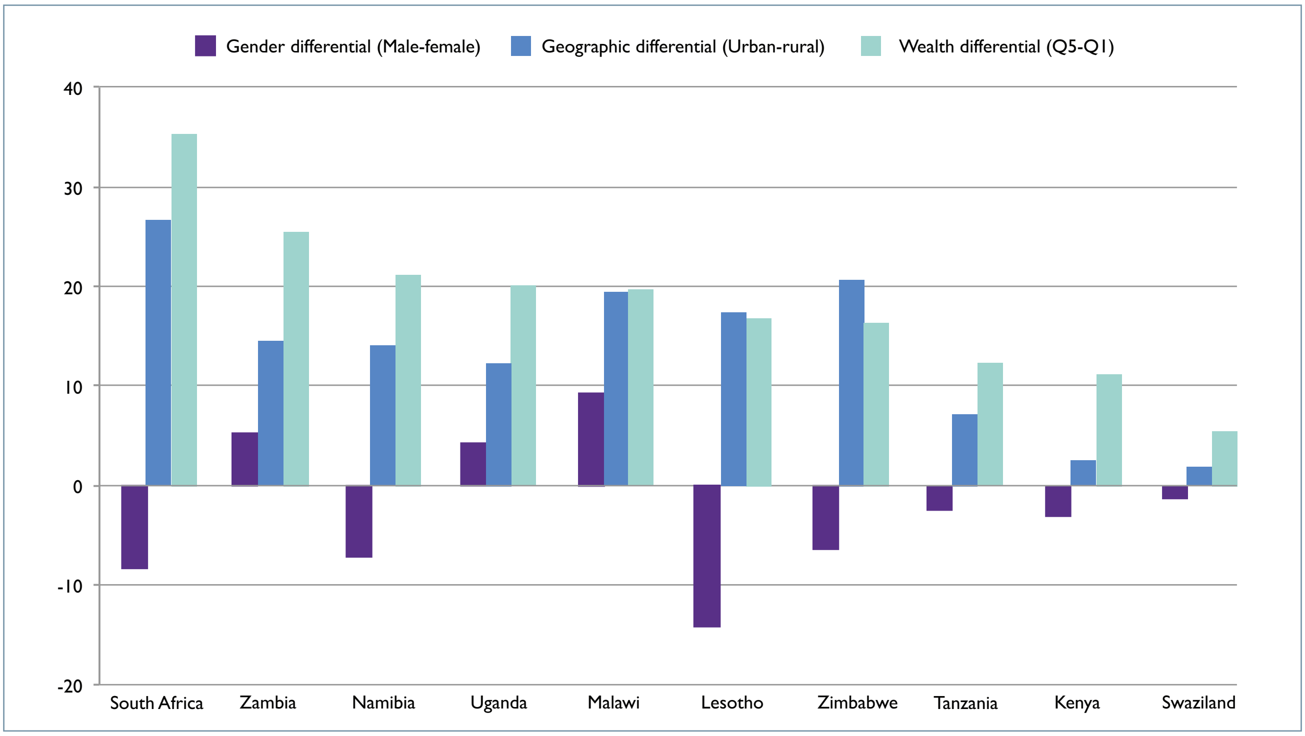
The African Learning Barometer, quoted above, also suggests that it is often the poorest and those who live in rural areas who are furthest behind; 53% of low-income children are not learning in South Africa compared to 11% of high-income children, and 48% of children in rural areas are not learning compared to 19% in urban areas.[101] Uwezo, a non-governmental organisation performing learning assessments in east Africa, found similar poor performance across all groups, but with low-income students falling furthest behind.[102]

x Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty, involving 12,000 children in 4 countries over 15 years. It is led by a team in the Department of International Development at the University of Oxford in association with research and policy partners in the 4 study countries: Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. Save the Children works in partnership with the Young Lives team.

xi A standard deviation is a measure of the difference between the overall average performance and the performance of a particular group. A result of 0.8 is generally considered large.

xii Girls tend to perform better on literacy and boys better on numeracy worldwide, a trend reflected in disadvantage in literacy for boys seen in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Literacy gaps in effective enrolment by gender, location and wealth



Source: Based on data from Spaull and Taylor (2012). 'Effective enrolment' Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers 21/12.

The Young Lives study also shows some evidence that inequalities in learning outcomes have worsened in recent years, as we discussed above. Its case study of Ethiopia found that it is the poorest who have suffered most from this.[103] Children from the poorest families were much more likely to be enrolled in school in 2009 compared with 2002, but they were less likely to be reading by the age of eight.

Disaggregating inequalities in this way is, of course, limiting and does not reveal the multiple and complex inequalities that can affect an individual child. It is often when children are in two or more disadvantaged groups that they have the worst educational outcomes. For example, poor girls living in remote, rural areas of Pakistan are particularly disadvantaged. Or, in Kenya, it is those children living in pastoralist communities in the north. In Cambodia, it is girls in rural areas from minority ethnicities. While the patterns of inequity are specific to each context and therefore vary greatly, we can still take one clear implication from this evidence: thinking about equity solely through the dominant lens of gender is increasingly inadequate.

The overall conclusion in this section is that we need to deepen our concern for inequality in education. The lessons we have learnt about the success of breaking down targets by gender can now be applied to other critical inequalities.

Post 2015 implications: *If schooling is to help ensure both widely-shared prosperity and also every child's right to education, then the post-2015 framework will have to provide clear incentives to focus on inequalities. Despite progress, many gender inequalities remain, not least at secondary school in regions like Africa. However, as well as retaining a focus on gender inequalities, increasingly this should broaden to include other inequalities, in particular those between rich and poor. Tackling these injustices should be at the centre of the post-2015 education and development framework.*

3.6 EARLY INEQUALITIES BEFORE SCHOOLING

Many children's life chances and educational opportunities are largely determined even before they step foot in school. Inequalities in early childhood care and development can form the basis of life-long disadvantage for some groups of children with serious human, social and economic consequences.

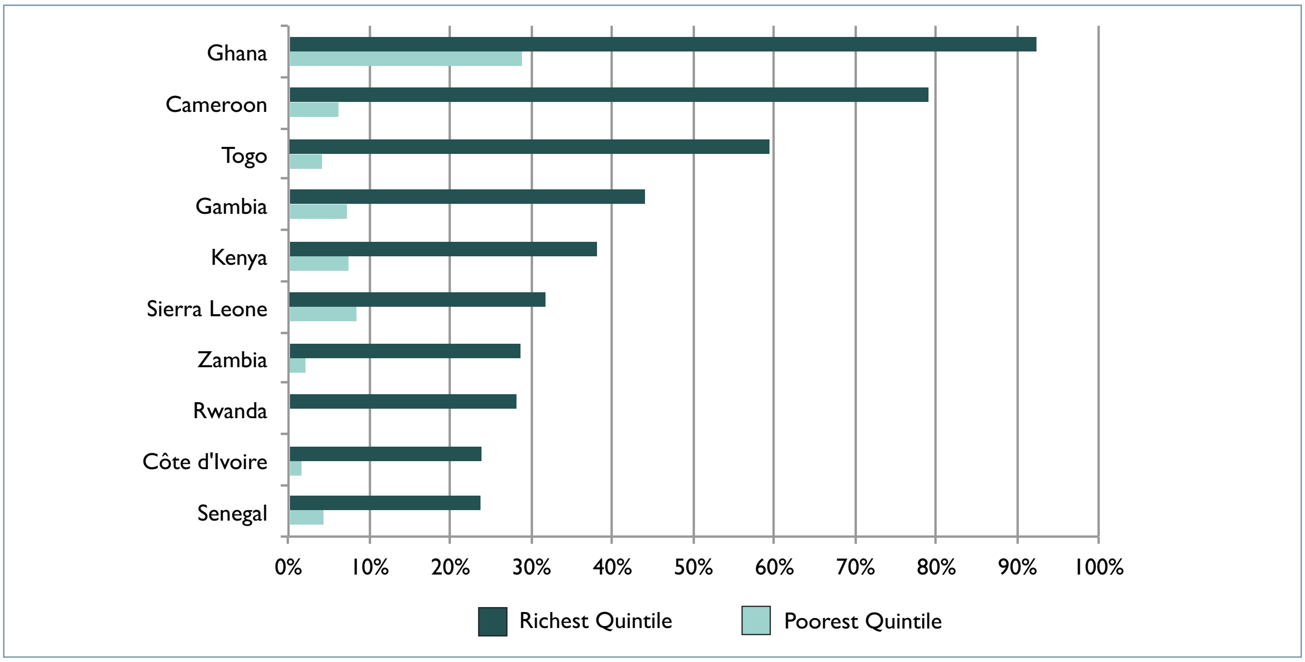
The evidence for this claim is now stronger than ever. Since the MDGs were developed, we have learnt even more about just how critical the early years of a child's life are, comprising pre-natal to age eight. A neuroscience revolution has shed more light on how early brain development sets the foundation for later learning and success in life.[104] And a compelling research base has demonstrated how the environment in which a child grows up will shape his/her development; for example, the nutrition and health, protection, and brain stimulation, as well as a rich literate environment for the development of language skills, are all important determining factors for the development of a child in the early years[105]

The link to schooling is obvious: without the right support and pre-school environment, children will not start school ready to learn. Numerous studies have demonstrated that children who start school with sufficient levels of development are more likely to stay in school, to achieve more and to succeed in life.[106] Yet it is often the poorest children who are the least likely to walk through the school doors on their first day ready to learn. They are less likely to have the kind of home environment which has nutritious food, needed in order to learn, or access to books and opportunities to support emergent literacy – for example, letter recognition and familiarity with print that so benefits children when they start to learn to read. As a result, the poorest are often held back in life from the start, a reality that only exacerbates later inequalities of opportunity.

The good news is that we know what works to improve early childhood development. Pre-school services, some based in formal 'centres', but others provided in the community or in the home, have been proven to have an impact. In 58 of the 65 countries in the largely developed world-based Performance in International Student Assessments (PISA) study, 15 year olds who had attended at least one year of pre-primary education outperformed students who had not, even after accounting for social background.[107] This finding is confirmed in some developing country settings.

- In Brazil, girls from low-income families who attended community-based pre-school programmes were twice as likely to reach grade 5 and three times as likely to reach grade 8, compared with those who attended no pre-school.[108]

Figure 10. Percentage of 3-4 year olds attending any type of pre-primary education by wealth quintile



Source: UNESCO WIDE Inequalities Database: http://www.education-inequalities.org/indicators/preschool_3. Generated 15 February 2013.

- In a rural area of Bangladesh, children who attended pre-schools and had access to better learning materials were more articulate, more numerate and better readers than their peers by the time they reached the second grade of primary school.[109]

However, despite the irrefutable importance of the early years and the clear evidence on what works to increase the likelihood that children start school ready to learn, quality pre-school provision remains neglected. Poor children in particular are being harmed by this continued international and national indifference.

Overall, provision of quality pre-school services remains extremely patchy in low-income countries. In 2010, only 15% of children in low-income countries received any form of formal pre-school provision.[110] And the inequalities can be large, as the chart on page 31 demonstrates.

Just as in primary school, there is an interesting public-private dynamic at play too. In Andhra Pradesh, in India, pre-school enrolment in rural areas is highest among the richest 20% of households, where almost one-third of children attend private institutions in contrast to children from the poorest households who are less likely to attend pre-school at all and if they do, more likely to use state-funded schools.[111] While those with a bit of additional money in the household budget can use a private provider, the poorest are unable to do so – they are left with either no provision at all or very poor quality care.

Implications for post-2015: *There is compelling evidence both for the importance of the early years and also that policies exist which can ensure even the most disadvantaged children start school ready to learn. Improving overall learning outcomes, but, most importantly, also narrowing gaps in opportunity between different groups, will require greater emphasis on early childhood and securing pre-school care for all. This is why the post-2015 education and development framework needs to have a sharper focus on early childhood development and in particular on targeting interventions on the poorest and most disadvantaged.*

3.7 KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

This section has highlighted three educational trends and developments that should shape thinking about the post-2015 framework. These reinforce some of the key implications of the wider trends identified earlier in this paper. They are:

- To respond to a *global learning crisis* with very low levels of learning, even of basic skills, there must be a core focus on ensuring that children are not only in school, but that they are learning once there.
- To respond to the high levels of educational inequality, including between girls and boys but also between rich and poor, a post-2015 framework must *place reducing inequalities at its core.* Without more equal education systems, the vision of a fairer society will remain unrealised.
- Recognising the compelling evidence on the *importance of a child's early years*, a post-2015 framework must ensure even the most disadvantaged children start school ready to learn.

4 A NEW APPROACH TO EDUCATION: 'EQUITY AND LEARNING'

This paper has surveyed the context within which the post-2015 education and development framework will be fashioned, assessing the main trends that are significantly changing both education systems and the broader development context around the world. It has then explored in detail the key educational challenges – with a focus on learning, equity and the early years. This final section presents and discusses Save the Children's proposals for the post-2015 framework.

4.1 EQUITY AND LEARNING: GRASPING THE OPPORTUNITY

Our assessment of trends shaping the wider world and trends within education has highlighted the following key implications for the post-2015 education and development framework:

- In order to help reduce damaging levels of income inequality in societies, post-2015 frameworks must place *reducing inequalities in educational opportunity at its core:* this means equal opportunities to learn for all children, including the most marginalised.
- To respond to the growth and demands of the 'middle classes' in many countries, publically-funded education, whether delivered by the state or another provider, will need to *improve the quality of the education* provided.
- To respond to demographic changes and youth bulges, many countries will require a *new attention on young people,* but substantial focus will need to remain on basic education – ensuring widespread acquisition of basic skills remains critical to achieving shared economic growth.
- To recognise the critical role of civil society in demanding greater educational investment and improved quality in newly middle-income countries, a post-2015 framework will need to *help empower domestic civil society organisations.*
- To ensure millions of children affected by *humanitarian emergencies* are able to access a good quality education, the global humanitarian community and countries affected will need to plan efficiently, adopt innovative approaches and ensure education is adequately financed so that learning happens in every context.
- To respond to a *global learning crisis* with very low levels of learning, even of basic skills such as reading, there must be a core focus on ensuring that not only are children in school, but that they are learning once there.
- Recognising the compelling evidence on the *importance of a child's early years*, a post-2015 framework must ensure even the most disadvantaged children start school ready to learn.

The box on page 34 sets out our proposed educational goal and targets and also suggests some indicative indicators. Running through this proposed framework and consistent with the analysis presented in this paper, are two key principles: **equity** and **learning**. This is reflected in the goal and targets.

Targets one and two both stress learning outcomes for all children, but also emphasise equity by including both girls and boys as well as children from different income groups. For example, to make progress on target one – *"Ensure that girls and boys everywhere are achieving good learning outcomes by the age of 12 with gaps between the poorest and the richest significantly reduced"* – we propose that both the overall proportion of girls and boys reaching good learning levels should increase and also that the gap between different income groups should narrow. One of the lessons from the existing MDGs is that there is a risk of merely aiming for the "low hanging fruit" and leaving some groups of children behind.[112] In our proposed framework, we are looking to incentivise a concern for learning for all children, but with a particular focus on those most vulnerable and likely to be left behind.

A concern for equity and learning also leads us to recommend that the post-2015 framework have a specific target on pre-school learning and child development, something neglected in the current MDGs. It will be critical to ensure that more children start school ready to learn, again with particular concern for the poorest and most disadvantaged. As with target number one, we have suggested that an early years target be measured using outcomes where possible, which is why the second indicator we suggest is a measure of levels of child development rather than just access to pre-school provision.

This paper has argued that while the majority of the focus of the post-2015 development framework should be on basic education, it must also include some focus on young people, as many countries and regions will be experiencing high and/or growing young populations. In particular, as highlighted in target 3, it will be critical to ensure that all young people achieve a set of learning outcomes that will prepare them to make a successful transition to adulthood.

Goal: by 2030 we will ensure all children receive a good quality education and have good learning outcomes

Indicative targets	*Potential indicators*
1. Ensure that girls and boys everywhere are achieving good learning outcomes by the age of 12 with gaps between the poorest and the richest significantly reduced.	**1a.** Proportion of all girls and boys who reach good learning levels in literacy and numeracy by the age of 12. **1b.** Narrowing of the gap in literacy and numeracy learning outcomes achieved by age 12 between the poorest and richest quintiles. **1c.** Ensuring that all the poorest quintile of children can read with measureable understanding to "read to learn" by the end of their third year in primary school. **1d.** Narrowing the gap in primary and secondary school completion rates between the students from the poorest and richest quintiles by at least 50% and gender parity. **1e.** Ambitious, country-specific targets (these could include more stretching objectives on core skills, but also targets for wider learning, such as life skills, science and ICT).
2. Ensure that the poorest young children will be starting school ready to learn, with good levels of child development.	**2a.** Proportion of the poorest children and of girls accessing early childhood development services. **2b.** Proportion of the poorest young children and proportion of girls achieving minimum levels of child development (potentially assessed through a survey like UNICEF's MICS survey).
3. Ensure that young people everywhere have basic literacy and numeracy, technical and life skills to become active citizens with decent employment.	**3a.** Equal access to quality learning opportunities (proportion of young adults with good literacy and numeracy skills). **3b.** Rates of youth unemployment and underemployment. **3c.** Young people with increased life skills (for example, social competencies, positive identity and values).

Naturally, any post-2015 development framework is only one element of a response to these challenges. But if we get it right, it could be an important one. The MDGs have proved a powerful motivating force and provided incentives for countries and donors alike to focus efforts to improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable. A post-2015 framework could play the same motivational and galvanising role. One critical aspect of our framework, however, is an attempt to achieve **a balance between a global framework and national level decision-making and target setting.** We have sought to allow national governments flexibility in two ways:

- First, wherever possible, our proposals have focused on *outcomes* rather than inputs. This will allow countries discretion in *how* they seek to achieve these goals. This may mean, for example, that in some contexts, the best way of teaching children effectively will not be enrolment in formal schooling – instead it may be the use of a range of different forms of delivery from non-formal education to online learning. Access to formal schooling may continue to be the answer for most children, but in itself it is not the ultimate objective – the ultimate objective is good quality *learning*, however it occurs.
- Secondly, our proposed framework suggests the global measurement of some particularly important indicators – a set of good learning outcomes which we believe all children should have a right to achieve. Measuring country performance against these measures will be a critical spur to improvement. But we also believe that this should be combined with states defining their own set of ambitious objectives that fit their circumstances and the demands of their changing economies and societies. Many countries, for example, will want to aim for more than a set of global floors and will need to focus on more than literacy and numeracy.

AN HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY

Our generation is the first in history to have within its reach the achievement of some much cherished development goals – the prospect of zero poverty and no child dying of preventable diseases. In education we have the same opportunity – to ensure that no child is excluded from a good quality education. Building on the progress in recent decades, we must ensure that all children are in school. But because of the progress we have made, we can now turn to the next great educational challenge – tackling the hidden exclusion of children being in school, but being failed by poor quality schools. Already 130 million children are in school and learning little or nothing. This means children sitting in classrooms copying letters on the chalkboard or into their book without understanding their meaning. It means millions of children's aspirations are curtailed as they disengage from learning and drop out of school.

Ours is the generation that can end such educational exclusion and ensure that all children can be not only in school, but also learning when there. However, achieving this vision will require concerted effort, sometimes difficult decisions and substantial change. In this paper, we have argued that a global learning goal, as part of the post-2015 development framework, would be one critical part of grasping this opportunity.

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ENDING THE **HIDDEN EXCLUSION**

Learning and equity in education post-2015

The last decade has seen enormous progress with millions more children in school. But as we strive to finish the job on access, we now need to focus on the next big challenge: ensuring that all children are both in school *and* learning.

Millions of children suffer from a 'hidden exclusion' from education. They may appear to be included – they are in school. But in reality, they are learning little or nothing. Furthermore, the poorest and most marginalised children are often most likely to be failed by poor quality schooling. Not only does this deprive millions of their right to education, but it also means we will fail to meet some of the world's biggest future challenges. Responding to the demands of growing middle classes, the growth in the number of young people and reducing soaring levels of inequality will all require good quality schooling for all children.

With the right decisions and level of ambition, our generation has the opportunity to ensure that no child is excluded from learning. Setting an ambitious post-2015 global learning goal, with a strong focus on the most deprived, will be a crucial part of realising this vision.

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