

Education Update
Background note

According to the 2006 United Nations Millennium Development Report, achieving the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education by 2015 (MDG 2) is a possibility, albeit a daunting one as sub-Saharan Africa lags behind other regions in making necessary progress since 1990.

The net enrolment ratio for primary education in developing countries improved from 79 per cent in 1990 to 86 percent in 2004. This growth of seven percentage points in 14 years represents an average annual rate of increase of 0.5 per cent for the developing world. But, if MDG 2 is to be achieved, the annual rate must increase to 1.26 per cent, more than two and a half times the rate achieved between 1990 and 2004.

In addition to the enrollment numbers, achieving MDG 2 will also mean improving attendance and completion rates. In this regard, the challenges are more nuanced and include addressing the target of MDG 3 of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2015. Some 22 per cent of girls of primary school age in developing countries are out of school, compared with 18 per cent of boys of the same age. Moreover, 30 per cent of children of primary school age in rural areas do not attend school, compared with 18 per cent in urban areas.

In order to help to accelerate progress in enrollment, attendance and completion, UNICEF is preparing an Education Strategy paper outlining the contribution of the organization and its partners to the Millennium Development Goals – directly to Goal 2 and the target of MDG 3 - and indirectly to all the Goals, as well as the six Education for All (EFA) Goals¹. Extensive preparatory consultations for the strategy included two informal briefing sessions for the Board within the last year. The strategy will fully support the work of partners for unified support to countries, especially the work of the five convening partners who are currently promoting development of the EFA Global Action Plan, under the leadership and coordination of UNESCO. In addition to UNICEF and UNESCO, EFA partners include UNDP, UNFPA and the World Bank.

The Global Action Plan is close to final and is expected to be presented to the EFA High-Level Group in Cairo in November 2006. It has been deemed prudent to conclude work on the Global Action Plan with partners before finalizing UNICEF's

* E/ICEF/2006/18

¹ The six EFA Dakar goals are more comprehensive than Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3, and guide the EFA movement led and coordinated by UNESCO.

Education Strategy for presentation to the Board in order to better align the work of UNICEF with the requirements of the Global Action Plan.

UNICEF is committed to working with partners to achieve universal primary education by 2015 and will help to set intermediate (2010) targets for results-based monitoring of this goal.