Why equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all are critical to the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Over the last decade, there has been significant progress in expanding access to primary education (MDG 2) and gender parity (MDG 3) with 50 million additional children in school than in 2000, many of whom are girls. However, enormous challenges remain. In 2012, 58 million children of primary school age and 63 million children of lower secondary school age were out of school, over half of whom were girls and over 28 million of whom lived in conflict-affected areas. Even for those in school, at least 250 million primary school age children were not learning basic skills. A 2014 UNESCO report the number of illiterate adults remains stubbornly high at 774 million and disparities in both enrollment and achievement persist for children with disabilities and children from indigenous and other vulnerable groups.

The benefits from investments in education are tremendous and well-documented; they include greater economic growth, improved public health and more resilient and peaceful societies. Education also contributes to reducing inequalities and eradicating poverty, while supporting the expansion of more just, inclusive and sustainable societies. For the last child to learn, education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda must focus on:

- **Equity**: disaggregating results to prioritize the most poor and vulnerable children, youth and adults.
- **Expanding access**: giving all children the skills, competencies, knowledge and values necessary to lead healthy and productive lives through early childhood, basic and secondary education and beyond.
- **Learning**: ensuring success is not defined solely by enrollment rates but also by what a child learns.
- **Enablers**: enabling learning with safe and adequate environments and well-trained teachers.

**Education goals and targets for the Post-2015 Development Agenda**

Extensive discussions among United Nations Member States, UN organizations and civil society have resulted in two proposals for education goals and targets: one from the intergovernmental Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals and the other from the Global Education for All Muscat Agreement. While continued effort is needed to completely align these two proposals, they share a common vision for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. As the intergovernmental negotiations unfold over the next several months, UNESCO and UNICEF, alongside partners, will be working with the education community towards a single global education goal in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all’, supported by a framework for action that includes relevant and measurable targets and indicators.

Achieving the targets will require a strong commitment by both governments and donors to allocate adequate, equitable and efficient financing to education. This is essential for ensuring all learners are taught by qualified,
professionally-trained, motivated and well-supported teachers and that education facilities are child-, disability- and gender-sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

**EDUCATION DATA SNAPSHOT**

**Figure 1:** Number of out-of-school children of primary school age by region and sex, 2000-2012

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 2:** Currently only the richest urban boys spend at least nine years in school

![Figure 2](image)

**Figure 3:** Number of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age by region and sex, 2000-2012

![Figure 3](image)

**Suggested Targets**

- By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys are ready for primary school through participation in quality early childhood development, care and education, including at least one year of pre-primary education
- By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes
- By 2030 ensure equal access for all women and men to quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, and have relevant skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
- By 2030, all youth and adults reach a proficiency level in literacy and numeracy sufficient to fully participate in society
- By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations

For more information on Education and the Post-2015 Development Agenda

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For more on UNICEF’s position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Please see: http://www.unicef.org/post2015/

9 The targets proposed in this UNICEF document are reflective of UNICEF’s mandate, and informed by and aligned with both the Muscat Agreement and the Report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals.