3 GIRLS LEFT OUT, COUNTRIES LEFT BEHIND
What is the scale of the problem that remains to be tackled if the Millennium Development Goal for gender parity in education by 2005 is to be met?

The ultimate goal is that by 2015, all boys and girls alike should have access to, and complete, a good quality primary education. ‘All’ implies that girls and boys must be equally well provided for; but there is a separate Millennium Development Goal that makes this explicit: to eliminate by 2005 all gender disparity in primary and secondary education, and to achieve by 2015 full gender equality in education – including enrolment, completion and learning achievement.

But these goals look dauntingly distant. Access to primary schooling is most usefully measured by net enrolment ratios. These increased during the 1990s in all regions and made for a world average of 81 per cent enrolment by 2002. But the regional variation is enormous. While enrolment rates in Latin America and the Caribbean are close to those in industrialized countries, at 94 and 97 per cent respectively, South Asia lags much further behind at 74 per cent, while sub-Saharan Africa languishes at a mere 59 per cent (see Figure 6: Primary net enrolment/attendance rates).

Every year an increasing number of children have been accommodated within primary education, but available places are not sufficient to keep pace with the annual growth in the school-age population. As a result, the global number of children out of school stubbornly remains undiminished at 121 million – and the majority is still girls.

This failure to reduce the overall number of children who do not attend school is worrying enough – especially bearing in mind the hazards, from exploitative child labour to HIV/AIDS, to which these out-of-school children
are disproportionately exposed – but the global figure hides an even more disturbing truth at the regional level. Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, accounts for a proportionately larger number of the world’s non-enrolled primary-school-aged children – 41 million in 1990 and 45 million in 2002.\textsuperscript{33}

Significantly, the mass of children out of school includes those who have dropped out early, as well as those who have never set foot in a classroom. The Millennium Development Goals specify that the world needs to ensure that children complete their primary schooling – it is not enough that they merely register and attend only for a year or two.

A recent World Bank study indicates that the population-weighted rate of primary-school completion in the developing world rose from 73 per cent to 81 per cent during the 1990s.\textsuperscript{34} Again, the global figure masks great regional and gender variations. In sub-Saharan Africa the completion rate has improved over the decade but it is still barely over 50 per cent, and if it continues to increase only at the present rate, it will barely reach 60 per cent by 2015. In the Middle East and North Africa completion rates are generally higher, at around 74 per cent, but have remained stagnant throughout the 1990s (see Figure 7: Primary-school-completion progress).\textsuperscript{35}

In many cases, out-of-school girls are ‘invisible’; they are either not reported or underreported. Many countries suffer from a real information gap in which populations in hard-to-reach areas are often not accounted for. In addition, countries

**FIGURE 6 PRIMARY NET ENROLMENT/ATTENDANCE RATES (1996-2002)**

Source: UNICEF, 2003
mostly report on averages and thus frequently conceal very serious gender disparities between internal regions, and economic and ethnic groups.

The same study indicates that if the rate of progress in the 1990s extends to 2015, nearly one child in five will still fail to complete primary school.36

Girls drop out

The gender gap in primary school enrolment certainly narrowed during the 1990s. The ratio of girls’ gross enrolment rate to boys’ in developing countries increased from 0.86 to 0.92. Nearly two thirds of developing countries improved on girls’ enrolment over the decade, with the biggest improvements seen in Benin, Chad, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Nepal, Pakistan and Sudan.37 In Morocco, the proportion of girls’ enrolment in rural areas shot up from 44.6 per cent in 1997–1998 to 82.2 per cent in 2002–2003.38

Yet girls’ primary school completion rate still lags way behind boys’, at 76 per cent compared with 85 per cent. This yawning gender gap means that millions more girls than boys are dropping out each year.39 As a result, the majority of the children not in school are girls.40 Again, the most worrying statistics come from sub-Saharan Africa, where the number of girls out of school rose from 20 million in 1990 to 24 million in 2002.41 Eighty-three per cent of all girls out of school in the world live in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and East Asia and the Pacific.42 The latest UNICEF global figures, which include both girls’ attendance

FIGURE 7 PRIMARY-SCHOOL-COMPLETION PROGRESS, 1990-2015

Note: data is weighted by country

and enrolment, show that 70 countries have rates of less than 85 per cent. This highlights the need for urgent, targeted action.  

Most countries reduced the gender enrolment gap in secondary education during the 1990s. The countries with the smallest proportion of girls enrolling in secondary school are, with the exception of Bhutan, all in sub-Saharan Africa; in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia, Guinea, Niger, Somalia and the United Republic of Tanzania the gross enrolment rate is under 10 per cent. This region also has few female teachers – less than one in four in some countries – though even here the proportion of female teachers is increasing. In two thirds of the Arab states women now make up at least half of teachers, while in Latin America and the Caribbean they account for 80 per cent of staff.  

**Hidden crises**

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, as in other countries in the Central and Eastern European region and throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, issues related to girls’ education constitute a ‘hidden crisis’. Since there are good attendance and enrolment rates among girls, their education is not seen as a concern, even though reports on the increasing number of girls who drop out of school, especially in rural areas, are an indication that a serious problem exists. In the past decade, enrolment rates in some countries in the Central and Eastern European region have decreased considerably at all levels from pre-primary to secondary (see Figure 8: Female participation in secondary education). Moreover, parity in enrolment does not equate to parity in education, which also includes completion and
PANEL 5

Goodbye to school fees

The Standard One classroom at Ayany Primary School in Kibera, Kenya, is a hive of activity. Excited pupils sit on the brightly carpeted floor. Some are writing on the chalkboard on the wall, while others are busy with their books. Among them is 10-year-old Silvia Akinyi, demonstrating her newly acquired skills on the board.

Not long ago, Silvia did not attend school. She was not alone. Where there is a price attached to education, the most vulnerable – the destitute, children orphaned by AIDS, girls – are left out of the classroom. School fees, together with hidden costs, such as charges for textbooks, uniforms and examinations, and opportunity costs associated with household responsibilities, such as caring for sick parents, continue to keep poor families throughout much of the developing world from sending their children to school.

In Kibera, the biggest slum in Nairobi, parents had been unable to enrol their children because many simply could not afford to. With an average income of about $27 a month – a sum that must cover rent and food, water and health care – they found it hard to find money for their children’s schooling. Silvia’s father, who works at small jobs, could not raise the $133 to enrol her in school, let alone the $27 for a school uniform.

“My parents used to quarrel with me whenever I asked them to take me to school,” recalls Silvia. “They would tell me school was for the rich and not for poor people like us.”

School fees are a particularly pressing issue in sub-Saharan Africa, where the rapidly rising number of children orphaned by AIDS is affected not only by poverty but also by the burdens of stigma and discrimination that are attached to the disease.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Enrolment pre fee abolition</th>
<th>Enrolment post fee abolition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>5.9m</td>
<td>7.2m (increase of 22% or 1.3m in first week of 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>1.9m</td>
<td>3m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>1.4m</td>
<td>3m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>2.5m (1997)</td>
<td>6.5m (2000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Yet, even in the face of these barriers, girls and boys will come to school when fees are removed. This certainly has been the case in Kenya. Since January 2003, more than 1.3 million children entered school for the first time under its free primary education policy. This has pushed the national primary school enrolment from 5.9 million to 7.2 million pupils. Similar experiences were reported in Malawi, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

The challenges that ensue

The jump in enrolment in Kenya has come with challenges. The Ayany school has witnessed an increase in enrolment over 100 per cent and, like many others throughout the country, found itself with too few desks, not enough stationery and little equipment. Classrooms built for 35 pupils were now crowded with more than 70.

In response, the Child-Friendly Primary School Initiative, a joint project of UNICEF and the Kenyan Ministry of Education begun in 2002, sought to improve school quality. The goal was to have children who entered school stay until they acquired basic primary-level competencies.

The World Bank, UK Department for International Development and UNICEF provided textbooks. Other educational materials and recreational equipment were supplied. This enabled those teachers who were trained in 2002 to convert basic Standard One classrooms into stimulating learning environments.

“The stimulating class is really exciting for both the children and the teachers,” says Mary Macharia, an Ayany Primary School teacher. “We have so far witnessed fewer drop-out rates as parents enrol more of their children in school.”

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that have achieved gender parity is to identify ways to expand the family and societal perception and expectations of girls’ capacity (see Figure 9: Children’s opinions on gender and education) – such as a push for greater participation in tertiary education and more leadership roles. These countries are ready for the societal transformation to help them make the leap and to further advance girls’ participation in society.

Funding shortfall

None of the world’s wealthier countries developed without making a significant investment in education. For example, Japan’s emergence as a major economic power in the first half of the 20th century is attributed by many to the emphasis it placed on education and literacy. Between 1906 and 1911, education consumed as much as 43 per cent of Japanese town and village budgets. More recently, the spectacular economic growth and poverty reduction seen in many East Asian countries in the last quarter of the 20th century has been attributed in good part to sustained investment in education. (See Figure 10: Government expenditure on education.)

If the spirit of the Millennium Declaration and the targets of the Millennium Development Goals are to be met – and the education goals are only one part of the picture – it is clear that governments in developing countries will have to bear the lion’s share of the responsibility. Many are already investing more in human development than ever before, but across the board there has not been the major shift of resources into education that is required. Only eight developing

“Many of the children have benefited from the recent money UNICEF gave for books, desks and chalk,” says Ms. Elsheba Kanyeri, Ayany School’s headteacher. “At least for now we cannot lose children because when we [used to] send them home to get exercise books, they never came back.”

Celestina Adongo, at age 15, is in class four. She should already be in high school but poverty and her status as an orphan kept her behind. Only when free primary education was announced did she see hope on the horizon. However, she feared her dream would be unfulfilled because her guardians could not afford the exercise books and writing equipment she needed.

“I thought something bad was going to happen, and I would be sent away for lack of books,” Celestina remembers. She says her prayers were answered when she received basic education supplies.

Kenya’s introduction of free primary school is rekindling hope and turning lives around – not only for Celestina, but for all its children.
countries in the period 1999 to 2000 committed more than a fifth of their government spending to education: Côte d’Ivoire (40.8 per cent), Togo (26.2 per cent), Malaysia (25.2 per cent), Azerbaijan (24.4 per cent), Comoros (23.5 per cent), Mexico (22.6 per cent), Saint Lucia (21.3 per cent) and Peru (21.1 per cent).48

It is also true that despite some significant exceptions (see Panel: African countries move closer to education goals, page 53), industrialized countries and international financial institutions have so far substantially failed to meet their part of the bargain. In 1990, both at the Jomtien Conference and the World Summit for Children, donor countries promised extra funds for education. In 1996, they made an additional commitment to ensure universal primary education by the year 2015.49

Instead, total aid flows to developing countries actually declined during the 1990s, from a peak of $60.6 billion in 1991 to $49.6 billion in 2000, a reduction of 18 per cent. No one could doubt that the greatest need in this period lay in sub-Saharan Africa, yet total development assistance to the region shrank by 14 per cent in real terms between 1990 and 2000, at the same time that aid to the East Asian region grew.50

Bilateral funding for education has plummeted even further, with a general decline through the decade followed by a dramatic cut in 2000 that left aid at $3.5 billion – a full 30 per cent lower than in 1990. World Bank International Development Association loans to education, which averaged $0.9 billion per year from 1990 to 1996, averaged only $0.6 billion between 1997 and 2001,51 a cut of 33 per cent.

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**BOX 3**

The Indicative Framework of the FTI

Policy Benchmarks for Education For All by 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Education Service delivery</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average annual teacher salary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pupil-teacher ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-salary spending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average repetition rate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System expansion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit classroom construction cost</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System financing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government revenues, as percent of GDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education spending, as share of govt. revenues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary education spending (as share of total education recurrent spending)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Launched in 2002, the Education For All Fast-Track Initiative is a global partnership of donors and developing countries with the objective of accelerating the progress of low-income countries towards the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education. Led by the World Bank and supported by most bilateral donors and key multilateral organizations, including UNESCO and UNICEF, as well as the regional development banks, the Fast-Track Initiative is a compact between donors – who are to provide additional policy, data, capacity-building, and financial support – and countries – who are to implement sound policies and accept clear accountability for results.

The Fast-Track Initiative aims to help countries achieve three key Education For All outcomes: 1) universal primary completion by 2015, 2) a net intake into first grade of 100 per cent of girls and boys by 2010, and 3) improved student learning outcomes. In addition, the Initiative aims to improve efficiency in the way resources are used in primary education service delivery, system expansion, system financing and spending for primary education. (See Box 3 on the Indicative Framework.)

An initial 18 countries – including 11 in Africa – were invited to join the Initiative. Each had a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper in place and an education sector plan agreed with donors. Five other high-population countries that do not yet have poverty reduction strategy papers in place were invited to receive intensified support to strengthen policies and capacity with the goal of meeting the Initiative’s conditions for expanded financing.

In November 2002, Initiative donors pledged over $200 million in additional support for primary education for the period 2003–2005 in the first seven Fast-Track Initiative countries – Burkina Faso, Guinea, Guyana, Honduras, Mauritania, Nicaragua, and Niger. This funding represents an increase of approximately...
40 per cent in official development assistance resources for primary education and will help educate about 4 million additional girls and boys.

**Value added**

**Country engagement.** In its first year, developing countries invited to join the initiative have acted with impressive speed to ensure their sector plans meet the new tests for credibility and sustainability embodied in its indicative framework benchmarks.

**Donor engagement.** Donors have also responded actively. The Initiative partnership has more than 20 bilateral and unilateral members and provides a forum for greater donor harmonization and coordination on funding, particularly where existing processes prove inadequate to meet funding needs at the individual country level.

**Partnering.** The Initiative has encouraged collaboration and partnership between a range of different development players. One such example is the Partnership on Sustainable Strategies for Girls’ Education, a multi-donor initiative that provides technical and financial support to developing countries in improving the design and implementation of programmes targeting girls’ education.

**Key contributions of the Fast-Track Initiative**

- **Focusing attention and action around a specific and shared goal.** Governments and donors are sitting down and planning systematically to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and the Education For All goals. In Guinea, the Initiative has helped kick-start high-level discussions about crucial sector and budget reforms. In Honduras and Yemen, it has helped mobilize increased domestic fiscal support for primary education.

- **Mobilizing increased resources for primary education.** An increase in official development assistance commitments of some 40 per cent has been achieved for the first seven Fast-Track Initiative countries.

- **Catalysing and helping sustain reforms.** The Initiative has helped Burkina Faso, Mozambique and Niger stay the course on politically sensitive – but fiscally necessary – adjustments in teacher salaries. In other countries, such as Viet Nam, it has put the need for increased domestic resources for education and higher teacher remuneration on the table. It has also encouraged uniform standards on the unit costs for classroom construction and ceilings in order to make donor resources go further.

- **Establishing the Donors Forum.** This provides a platform to review progress on the ground and coordinate responses to identified policy and financing gaps.

- **Highlighting issues of aid coordination and financing.** The Initiative is encouraging donor action to reduce the transaction costs of development aid. It has also raised the issue of providing more predictable long-term...
There are recent, tentatively hopeful, signs that the climate for development assistance is changing, partly as a direct result of the commitments represented by the Millennium Development Goals. A new consensus on investing in education emerged at the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico in 2002, and education forms a vital part of the ‘World Fit for Children’ commitments made at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children that same year. Governments, including those in the G-8, have pledged to increase their overall aid, particularly their aid to basic education. (In 2001, however, only France and the Netherlands channeled more than 5 per cent of their aid to basic education.)\(^{52}\)

The World Bank has launched the Fast-Track Initiative – a venture that could help transform the Education For All landscape (see Panel on the Fast-Track Initiative, page 39).

But pledges and promises are not always realized (see Box 4: The Global Campaign on Education update). The current global pre-occupation with security may result in some funding commitments being abandoned. As it stands, the low level of international assistance represents part of the problem of keeping girls out of school rather than the key part of the solution it must become if all children are to enjoy their right to an education.

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**BOX 4**

**THE GLOBAL CAMPAIGN ON EDUCATION UPDATE**

“In April the World Bank’s Development Committee requested a progress report on the FTI in time for their meeting in Dubai. They will not get one – because there is no progress to report.

The chief responsibility for this embarrassing predicament rests with rich countries. Many of the first 18 countries invited to join the FTI have already committed to far-reaching and ambitious reform of their education systems in order to get every child into school. However, donors have failed to deliver convincing backing for these plans. Instead, they endorsed 10 of the plans, then insisted on drastic cutbacks, and finally declined to honour even the much-reduced financing requests that remained.

Rich countries have also refused to extend the FTI partnerships to any of the additional countries that have met the entry requirements (a comprehensive education sector plan nested in a Poverty Reduction Strategy) since the FTI’s launch. In this way, what was intended as the foundation for a new global partnership risks being whittled down to a small club of ‘donor favourites’.”

(Source: Global Campaign for Education, ‘Education For All Fast Track: The No-Progress Report,’ Global Campaign for Education Briefing Paper, September 2003.)

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financing to countries to fund recurrent costs. It has stimulated donors to adopt more flexible forms of support, such as pooled funding at the country level and the flexibility to meet recurrent costs.

- Creating a strong incentive for education reform in countries outside the Initiative framework, such as Kenya and Senegal.

**Challenges**

Despite progress under the Fast-Track Initiative, donor procedures are not yet harmonized and financing remains fragmented. Much donor assistance continues to be input-driven, rather than providing more flexible support for core system expenditures. Aid often flows to historically preferred, rather than performing, countries.

Although donors have strived to mobilize additional funding for Fast-Track Initiative countries on a case-by-case basis, the process has revealed some ‘donor orphans.’ Without new funding for these countries, the Initiative will not be able to deliver on the donor commitment that “no country with a credible plan for Education For All will be thwarted for lack of external support.” The momentum of the Fast-Track Initiative could easily be lost if a fundamental principle of the compact – expanded assistance to support effective policies – is not honoured.
Millennium Development Goals

Two goals – achieve universal primary education and promote gender equality and empower women – are critical to reducing child mortality. As girls’ education rates rise, child mortality rates plummet.

Secondary education for girls
Females as percentage of males in secondary schools 1995–2000

- Over 100%
- 91%–100%
- 81%–90%
- 80% and under
- No data

Primary school achievement
Percentage of children entering primary school who reach grade 5
Survey data 1999–2001
Selected countries
REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY

Child deaths
Countries where more than 15% of children die before they reach the age of 5 in 2002.

Measles
Countries where fewer than 50% of children aged 1 year old have been immunized against measles in 2002.

This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers. Used lines represent approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.