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**BASIC EDUCATION FOR ALL BOYS
AND GIRLS IN THE WORLD GETS
DELAYED**

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Abstract:

UNICEF believes there is little hope to achieve the universal expansion of primary education. This goal, as stated in the 2015 Millennium Development Goals, has come to a standstill due to governments' lack of political will, as well as the decrease in donor funding. Being out of the school system seriously affects the future of children in the poorest countries, mainly the ones in conflict, and it especially harms girls.

Keywords:

Education for all, Millennium Development Goals, lack of schooling, countries in conflict, educational equality.

THE MOST POWERFUL TOOL TO REDUCE POVERTY IS NOT SPREADING

In the year 2000, the UN announced the 8 Millennium Goals as the commitment of 189 countries with human development:

1. Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty
2. Achieve Universal Primary Education
3. Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women
4. Reduce Child Mortality
5. Improve Maternal Health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure Environmental Sustainability
8. Develop a Global Partnership for Development

Number 2, Achieve Universal Primary Education: ensure that all the boys and girls in the world will be able to finish a complete primary school stage¹ by 2015 is undoubtedly one of the most ambitious, since it is directly related to others such as the promotion of gender equality, the reduction of mortality in children under five, the fight against the lack of health safety, and the promotion of a world alliance for development.

That very year, more than 1100 participants representing 164 countries in the World Education Forum approved the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action, which established four basic objectives under the title “Education for All: Fulfilling our Shared Commitments”:

- Universalizing Primary Education
- Achieving Literacy for All Adults
- Achieving Education Equality between the two genders
- Improving the Quality of Education

Fourteen years later, as the 2014 follow-up report² shows the results of this objective seem to be at a standstill and have not shown any remarkable progress since 2012. Despite the advances and improvements of the last years, when the 15-year deadline established by the UN was about to expire, the expansion of this objective seems to have come to a halt. The stagnation of the process began in 2007; hence, in 2012 there were still 58 million children who did not attend school.

The right to education and the need to guarantee it to every child affects all the other objectives, since it is directly related to countries’ economic and social development. The

¹ <http://www.un.org/es/millenniumgoals/>

² <http://www.un.org/es/millenniumgoals/pdf/mdg-report-2014-spanish.pdf>

human development index measures a country's achievements through the analysis of three basic dimensions for their inhabitants: longevity and life expectancy; literacy and enrolment in the different schooling levels, and per capita income.

Table 1

Human Development Group or Region	Human Development Index		Life expectancy at birth		Average schooling period		Expected schooling period		Per Capita Gross National Income (2011 PPA in USD)	
	2010	2013	2010	2013	2010	2013	2010	2013	2010	2013
<i>Very high human development</i>	0.885	0.890	79.7	80.2	11.7	11.7	16.2	16.3	38 548	40 046
<i>High human development</i>	0.723	0.735	73.9	74.5	8.1	8.1	13.1	13.4	11 584	13 231
<i>Average human development</i>	0.601	0.614	67.1	67.9	5.5	5.5	11.3	11.7	5368	5960
<i>Low human development</i>	0.479	0.493	58.2	59.4	4.1	4.2	8.7	9.0	2631	2904
<i>Arab States</i>	0.675	0.682	69.7	70.2	6.2	6.3	11.7	11.8	15 281	15 817
<i>Oriental Asia-Pacific</i>	0.688	0.703	73.5	74.0	7.4	7.4	12.3	12.5	8628	10 499
<i>Europe and Central Asia</i>	0.726	0.738	70.7	71.3	9.6	9.7	13.3	13.6	11 280	12 415
<i>Latin America and the Caribbean</i>	0.734	0.740	74.2	74.9	7.9	7.9	13.8	13.7	12 926	13 767
<i>Southern Asia</i>	0.573	0.588	66.4	67.2	4.7	4.7	10.6	11.2	4732	5195
<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>	0.488	0.502	55.2	56.8	4.8	4.8	9.4	9.7	2935	3152
<i>World</i>	0.693	0.702	70.3	70.8	7.7	7.7	11.9	12.2	12 808	13 723

Source: UN Development Program. 2014 Report on Human Development: Sustaining Human Progress - Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience.

Therefore, the education of a country's inhabitants has decisive importance when it comes to overcoming poverty, and it also influences hygienic conditions and a healthy lifestyle of individuals and families. A net of basic schools reduces the risk of child neglect in periods of crisis in the countries, halts children soldier recruiting and reduces children's exposure to sexual violence. When a country manages to get all its children to attend school, it can offer them an active role in social, political and economic participation. Only through the schooling of all the children can we tackle inequality and prevent girls from being excluded from social life.³

³ <http://datos.bancomundial.org/tema/educacion>

PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE, BUT THE PROCESS SEEMS TO HAVE COME TO A HALT

In order to assess world progress in the attainment of the objectives established in Dakar, all 160 countries that signed the agreement committed to make an annual review of the processes through the publication of successive follow-up reports.⁴ These partial reports show that only one third of these countries had reached the objective of education equality. Despite the fact that between 1999 and 2005 the number of educated children increased by 40 million, and progress has been made in terms of schooling and equality in countries such as Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, India, Mozambique, Tanzania, Yemen or Zambia, the results of the assessments show the scarce quality of education, and the result is unequal and insufficient even in the 51 countries which are about to attain the objectives.

The process for the achievement of universal basic education calls for the attainment of other goals that are equally ambitious, such as reducing adult illiteracy by half, increasing child education and programs for the non-educated youth, stopping early school leaving, and improving the quality of education. The 2014 report⁵ also points out the need to count on reliable data and valid statistics, which are essential to have guidelines, determine the areas with the most disparities and provide better planning and assessment.

Throughout these years, governments and donors have prioritised formal education in primary school at the expense of preschool, literacy programs and attention to the youth and adults. Today, one in five adults and one in four women in the world are illiterate.

On the other hand, the difficulties faced by minors who live in conflict areas and early school leaving have only increased: one in four children enrolled in primary school in developing regions leave the school cycle before it is finished. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, only 3 in 5 students finish the full cycle.

Despite the fact that world school attendance rate has increased, that of students who do not finish their primary studies does not decrease. Leaving war's direct impact aside, being older or farther from school, and the need to reconcile school and work are some of the factors that explain early school leaving.

The last report published also highlights education at early ages. World population of children under 5 is 659 million and it is mostly present in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States and South Asia. This number is expected to decrease from the current 9.1% to 7.9% by 2050, but the effects of a lacking educational assistance, poverty and malnutrition in the early

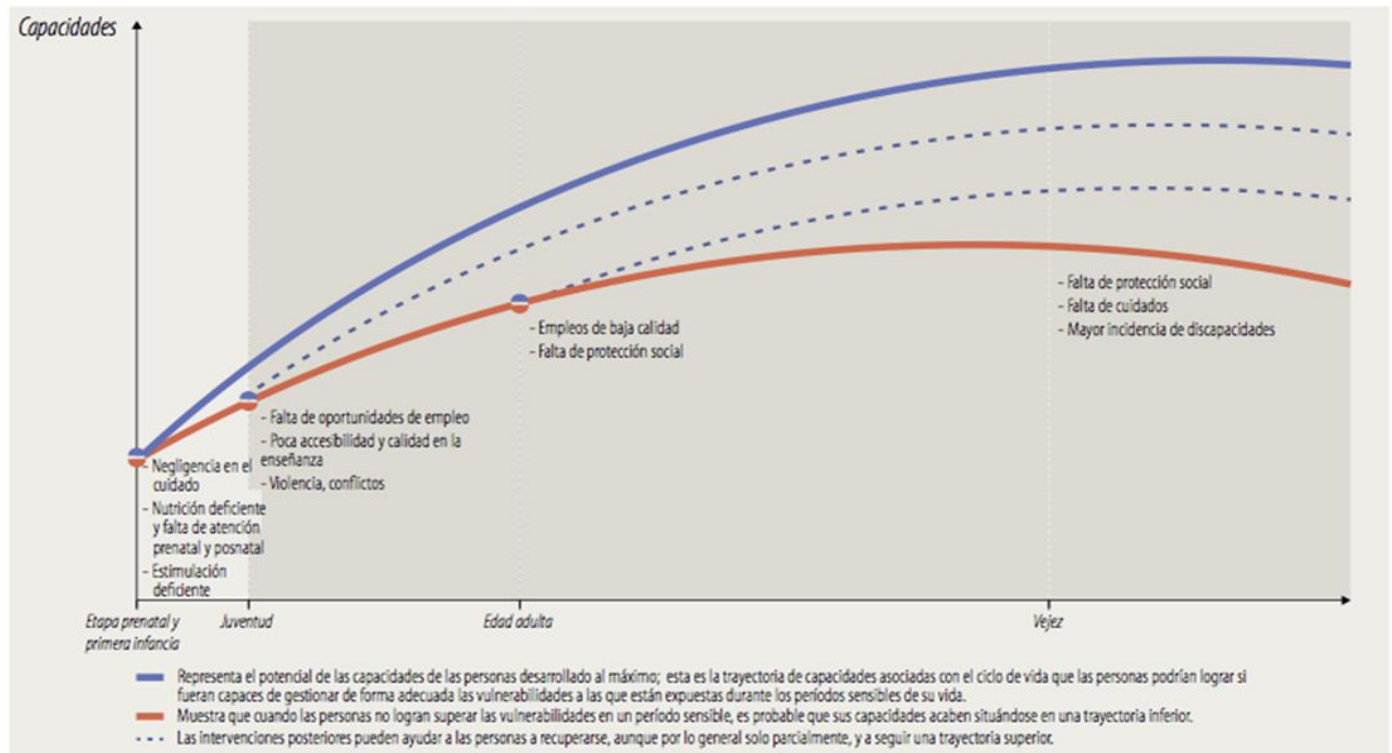
⁴ Todos datos proceden de los informe de UNESCO. los informes consultables y descargables en (<http://www.unesco.org/new/es/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/the-report-and-efa/>)

⁵ Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all

childhood leave a definitive mark in generations of individuals. If educational performance decreases, not only is children's learning restricted, but the structural vulnerability they will suffer all along their lives increases. Children born in poverty, who are hungry and receive no care, tend to get worse results at school, have a more fragile health and less probabilities to get a decent job, which perpetuates vulnerability as they also invest less on their children.⁶

Chart 2

Cuando se realizan las inversiones en capacidades vitales en una etapa más temprana, las perspectivas futuras son mejores



Fuente: Cálculos de la Oficina del Informe sobre Desarrollo Humano.

Traditionally, efforts have targeted primary education, such as acquiring basic arithmetic, reading and writing skills. This stage is essential, but not enough. Nowadays, 121 million children are out of school, and more than 130 million do not have the basic skills advocated by education systems.⁷ Only 60% of the children that age receive education beyond primary school, only 15% in Africa.

Finally, 2012 illiteracy numbers show there were 781 million illiterate adults in the world, 126 were young, and 60% women. Only 83 countries – with a little more than a third of the world population – have achieved, or are able to do so by 2015, the aim of putting an end to

⁶ Ibidem, p. 62 and following.

⁷ <http://blogs.unicef.org/2015/01/19/data-is-critical-to-achieving-universal-primary-and-secondary-education/>

illiteracy. Nevertheless, another 43 countries – with 37% of the world population – might not make it.

GIRLS' EDUCATION: POLITICAL WILL IS MORE POWERFUL THAN GDP

UNICEF claims there are more than 93 million minors who do not attend school, most of them girls, and almost 80% of the latter live in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

The countries with the greatest successes in girls' education are starting to acknowledge the efficiency and benefits that this effort brings. Between 1990 and 2000, Bolivia, Kenya and Cameroon led the list of countries with the greatest progress in the education of girls. On the contrary, Rwanda, Iraq and Malawi have not made any progress, mainly due to epidemics such as AIDS, fast demographic growth and armed conflicts.

Some of the factors that explain the discrimination of girls in education have to do with the difficulties to pay the school fees, the girls' dedication to domestic work and to taking care of their siblings, and the existence of a hostile environment at school, as that generated by teachers and classmates who intimidate or behave with violence towards female students. Furthermore, the lack of separate toilets for boys and girls, as well as the long distances between home and school undermine girls' security, thus their families prefer to keep them at home.

However, even if it may seem that these factors are fatally determined by poverty and gross domestic product, many countries with few resources are making efforts to improve girls' education – such as Mongolia, Kenya or Madagascar –, whereas others such as Saudi Arabia, Oman or Equatorial Guinea are last on the list. Kenya has a GDP of 1,020 USD, and still 99 girls go to school for every 100 boys. Saudi Arabia's GDP is twelve times that of Kenya's, but only 57% of girls of primary school age receive such education and only 67% of adult women can read and write.⁸

A SPECIAL CASE: THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN CONFLICT AREAS

According to the last report, 50% of children who do not attend school live in conflict areas. Armed conflicts directly affect children, but also educators, facilities and infrastructures, which have become targets for terrorist groups, armed forces and paramilitary groups. When a school is destroyed, children and youngsters will probably find it hard to access

⁸ Save the children, *Estado mundial de las madres 2005. El poder y las promesas de la educación de las niñas*.

Available at

<http://www.savethechildren.es/docs/Ficheros/36/Estado%20Mundial%20de%20las%20madres%202005.pdf>

education again. The impact goes beyond the direct effects on those children, since it can definitely affect the personal development of a whole generation of citizens.

The attack on Malala in Pakistan, the kidnapping of almost 300 Nigerian students by Boko Haram in April 2014, the death of 30 children in the school bombing in Homs, Syria in October 2014, or the 132 dead school children in a Taliban attack in Peshawar, Pakistan in December 2014 are some of the most highlighted episodes in the media.

The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) gathers information from more than 30 countries that since 2009 have suffered attacks to schools, teachers and students, or have suffered and occupation and military use of these places by armed forces.⁹ Diya Nijhowne, director of this coalition points out the need to apply the Guidelines to Protect the Schools from the Military Use¹⁰ with the aim of making both State forces and non-State armed groups comply with international laws and avoiding the exposure of schools to armed attacks. It is necessary to reject the use of schools as barracks, bases, training camps or detention centres, since this increases the risk of sexual violence for children. Countries such as Algeria, Croatia, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mexico, South Africa, South Sudan and others that have experienced conflicts, such as Filipinas or Colombia, already include in their legislation the protection of schools from military use.¹¹ So far, 29 countries have publicly shown their support to these guidelines. Spain should adhere to this growing movement.

CONCLUSION

Significant progress has been made between 2000 and 2012 in developing regions. The number of boys and girls out of school has been reduced from 100 million in 2000 to 60 million in 2007. From this date on, progress has halted; therefore some regions such as North Africa –which had an enrolment rate of 80% in 1990 and had almost reached universal primary education in 2012– will not attain the objective in 2015. The strong demographic growth indexes, the proliferation of armed conflicts and public health emergency situations in the area have hampered this process.

Even if the number of schooled children in the world doubled between 1990 and 2012 up to 149 million, there are still 33 million children of school age who are not attending it, 56% of

⁹ <http://www.protectingeducation.org/promoting-programmatic-measures-prevention-and-protection>

¹⁰ *Guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict*. Available at http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/guidelines_en.pdf

¹¹ http://elpais.com/elpais/2014/11/17/planeta_futuro/1416234594_837366.html

which are girls.¹² The hopes that universal education would be reached in 2012 were weaker and weaker despite significant progress made by many poor countries.

The causes of the slowdown of the project aiming at providing basic education for all the children are not only related to the funding deficit, but also to the scarce responsibility some States have shown. The financial crisis, armed conflicts and pandemics in Africa are some of the factors that can explain the international contributions setback. Aid increased until 2010, but then decreased by 7% and fell from 6,200 million dollars in 2010 to 5,800 million dollars in 2011. Between 2010 and 2011, aid fell by 9%. Kishore Singh is the UN Special Rapporteur on education; he estimates that every State should invest at least 6% of their GDP or between 15 and 20% of their education budget in order to attain the objective of universal basic education.¹³ If the right to an education is recognised by international rules, States must make an effort to fulfil this right.

However, UNICEF does not let up in its effort to make fight against poverty an important date in the world agenda, and has launched a global survey where the care for a good education for all is very present. *Have your say. The United Nations wants to know what matters most to you.*¹⁴

Advanced developing countries face the most important challenges, since they cannot shape an education system without paying attention to its quality. Not only capital differentiates poor countries from rich countries, but also knowledge. Inequality, exclusion, poverty, poor quality education and school dropout exacerbate the gap among countries.

Finally, it is obviously necessary to increase the human security levels¹⁵ in order to protect what has been achieved in terms of development and education. It is the Governments' responsibility to offer something beyond life expectancy: hope for the future for all, for families, for women, children and youngsters who despite their difficulties persist in their will to attend school even in the least favourable conditions.

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¹² Millennium Development Goals. 2014 Report. Available at: <http://www.un.org/es/millenniumgoals/pdf/mdg-report-2014-spanish.pdf>

¹³ Interview on newspaper El país. Available at http://elpais.com/elpais/2014/12/01/planeta_futuro/1417450255_908162.html

¹⁴ *Toma la palabra. La ONU quiere saber qué es lo que más te importa.* Available at <http://vote.myworld2015.org/es/>

¹⁵ Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, *Los aspectos humanos en la política común de seguridad y defensa de la unión europea*, Analytical document , 25th September 2013. Available at http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2012/DIEEEA40-2012_FactorHumanoPCSD_IJGS.pdf