

The State of the World's Children 1999



Education



THE STATE
OF THE WORLD'S
CHILDREN
1999

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Education For All: Making the right a reality

The State of the World's Children 1999 reports on the efforts of the international community to ensure that all its children enjoy their human right to a high-quality education — efforts that are resulting in an 'education revolution'. The goal of this worldwide movement: Education For All. 5

Towards that end, the work of governments, non-governmental organizations, educators, communities, parents and children is informed by a definition of education that includes, but goes far beyond, schooling. Within this definition, education is an essential human right, a force for social change — and the single most vital element in combating poverty, empowering women, safeguarding children from exploitative and hazardous labour and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment and controlling population growth. Education is a path towards international peace and security.

This chapter includes examples of initiatives that meet the child's right to education at the international, regional, national and local levels. It is divided into three sections.

The right to education: This section explores the historical context in which children's right to education has been repeatedly affirmed, for example, in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1990 World Summit for Children and the 1990 World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien (Thailand). 7

The education revolution: As the world's commitment to the principle of Education For All is put into practice at the local level, certain elements have emerged as necessary for its success: Schooling should provide the foundation for learning for life; it needs to be accessible, of high quality and flexible; it must be gender sensitive and emphasize girls' education; the State needs to be a key partner; and it should begin with care for the young child 21

Investing in human rights: Despite the progress of the last decade, the education revolution seems in danger of being cut short by an apparent dearth of resources and growing indebtedness in the developing world. This section argues that, despite these obstacles, education is one of the best investments a country can make in order to prosper. It calls for the political will necessary to make the vision of Education For All a global reality. 79

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Education is a multilinked variable in a country's statistical profile — connected not only to the obvious measure of literacy but also to a range of other indices including mortality, fertility and life expectancy rates, population growth, nutritional status and economic progress. The eight tables in this report profile 193 countries listed alphabetically. The countries are measured by basic indicators, nutritional status, health status, educational levels, demographics, economic indicators, the status of women and the rate of progress on major indicators since 1960. Countries are shown on page 93 in descending order of their estimated 1997 under-five mortality rates, which is also the first basic indicator in all tables.

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Foreword

Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development.

Yet, as *The State of the World's Children 1999* report points out, 130 million children in the developing world are denied this right — almost two thirds of them girls. Nearly 1 billion people, or a sixth of the world's population, are illiterate — the majority of them women. This is a violation of rights and a loss of potential and productivity that the world can no longer tolerate.

Half a century ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights spelled out a global vision for peace and prosperity that included the right to education. The Convention on the Rights of the Child — the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history — enshrines the right of all children to a primary education that will give them the skills they need to continue learning throughout life.

This report demonstrates that the right to education is guiding classroom practice, shaping curricula and finding practical expression in schools around the world. It is establishing schools as oases of respect and encouragement for children. It is giving us classrooms where the principles of democracy are upheld and embraced. It is contributing to enhanced retention rates and reduced drop-out rates.

Motivated students leave school more prepared to take up the reins of the future; they are better empowered to improve their own lives and, later, the lives of their children.

When the right to education is assured, the whole world gains. There is no instant solution to the violations of that right, but it begins with a simple proposition: that on the eve of the 21st century, there is no higher priority, no mission more important, than that of Education For All.



Kofi A. Annan
Secretary-General of the United Nations

Chapter I

Education For All: Making the right a reality



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A primary school student in China.



The right to education

Nearly a billion people will enter the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names — much less operate a computer or understand a simple application form. And they will live, as now, in more desperate poverty and poorer health than most of those who can. They are the world's functional illiterates — and their numbers are growing.¹

The consequences of illiteracy are profound, even potentially life-threatening. They flow from the denial of a fundamental human right: the right to education, proclaimed in agreements ranging from the 50-year-old Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the world's most universally embraced human rights instrument.

Yet despite these ringing affirmations over the past half-century, an

in sub-standard learning situations where little learning takes place (Figs. 1-3). Girls crowd these ranks disproportionately, representing nearly two of every three children in the developing world who do not receive a primary education (approximately 73 million of the 130 million out-of-school children).⁴

Ensuring the right of education is a matter of morality, justice and economic sense. There is an unmistakable correlation between education and mortality rates, especially child mortality. The implications for girls' education are particularly critical.

A 10 percentage point increase in girls' primary enrolment can be expected to decrease infant mortality by 4.1 deaths per 1,000, and a similar rise in girls' secondary enrolment by another 5.6 deaths per 1,000.⁵

This would mean concretely, in

Article 28

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:
 - (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
 - (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;
 - (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
 - (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;
 - (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.
3. States Parties shall promote and

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