



The Hague International Model United Nations

Forum: Sustainable Development Commission 1 (SDC1)

Issue: Measures to free primary and secondary schooling for all children by 2030 [SDG4]

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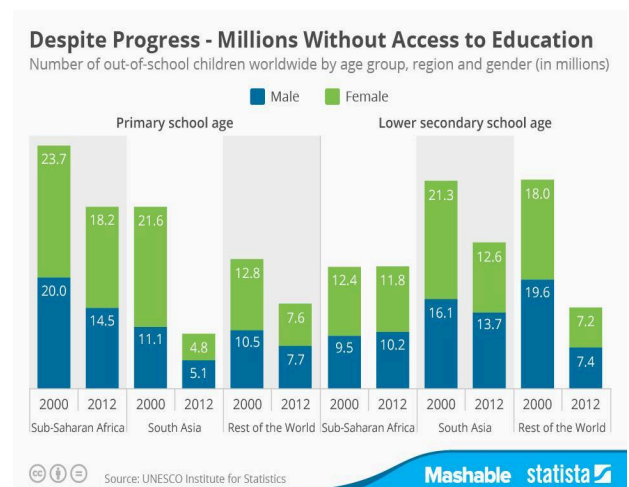
Introduction

Education, specifically primary and secondary schooling, play a fundamental role in the personal growth of individuals, and the progress of communities. At the individual level, through education, the child acquires essential skills, learns societal norms, develops critical thinking, is helped in navigating life and contributing to society. At the societal level, education reduces poverty and unemployment, improves public health, reduces crime rates, and increases civic and political engagement.

Nevertheless, despite its importance, primary and secondary schooling remains inaccessible to millions worldwide. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), over 270 million children worldwide are out of education.¹ The barriers to education are complex and multidimensional, ranging from economic hardships, to social inequalities, and infrastructural challenges.

Addressing these barriers is vital in achieving the 4th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), “Quality Education”, specifically goal 4.1, which aims to ensure that by 2030 every boy and girl receives a free, fair, and high-quality primary and secondary education that results in meaningful learning outcomes.² With less than 5 years until 2030, global action must be taken immediately, to ensure every child’s right to education. If this isn’t tackled, cycles of poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment will be further perpetuated, holding back entire nations from progression.

Definition of Key Terms



Primary Schooling

Primary schooling is the first stage of formal education, teaching fundamental skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, while fostering personal development, and preparing students (typically aged 6-12) for secondary education.

Secondary Schooling

Secondary schooling builds on what was learnt in primary school, offering experiences that prepare students for work, further non-tertiary, and tertiary education. The typical age range for this stage is 12-18 years of age, but it depends on each country.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an approach which aims to provide equal learning opportunities for all children, irrespective of their backgrounds, abilities, or impairments.

Background Information

Barriers to Primary and Secondary Schooling

Economic

Poverty is recognised as the most prominent factor which inhibits education. Families struggling with poverty often have to choose between sending their children to school or covering basic necessities. School uniforms, books, supplies, and exam fees are extra costs of schooling (hidden fees), even if tuition is free. The vast cost of materials makes it extremely hard for those in poverty to support their children's education. It is estimated that children living under the poverty line are 4 times more likely to be out of school, than their counterparts.³

Additionally, child labour is another driver in the inaccessibility to education. Children may be required to work in order to contribute to household income, prohibiting them from attending school. According to the Child Labour Global Estimates of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) at the beginning of 2020, 160 million children worldwide were trapped in situations of child labour.⁴

Moreover, due to lack of funding, educational systems cannot supply the staff, resources, or infrastructure to run efficiently without proper funding. Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) can't fund their educational systems, thus foreign help is needed. Yet, only 20% of international aid for education goes to them.⁵

Infrastructural and Geographic

In rural and isolated locations, schools are often far from children's homes, thus making regular attendance difficult. In many LEDCs, basic facilities, including classrooms, electricity, clean water, and sanitation, are lacking, making it difficult for students to attend school, and if they attend, it is difficult for them to focus and learn efficiently.



Figure 1: School facilities in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT).⁶

Social, Cultural, and Political

Gender norms in many countries dictate how girls act, expecting them to prioritise caregiving and domestic duties, instead of formal education. Also, many countries disregard the education of girls in comparison to boys, restricting their access to opportunities, and the freedom and empowerment of future employment prospects.

Political factors also restrict accessibility to education. Violent conflicts force families to flee their homes, keeping children far from schools, whilst also creating teacher shortage, and making teaching environments unsafe. Additionally, repressive or extremist regimes may impose restrictions on education, like banning specific books, restricting access to certain groups, and limiting research and academic freedom. One example is the Taliban in Afghanistan, who have repeatedly suspended secondary education for women.⁷

Importance of Education

Individual Level

Through education children develop critical thinking which is essential for informed decision-making and solving complex problems. This helps children analyse circumstances, navigate challenges, and be more receptive to various viewpoints, while improving their memory and concentration. Moreover, it helps children build confidence, as they meet new people, have

chances to show off their skills, and express their opinion freely, while also offering the opportunity for self-discovery. It also fosters self discipline and time management skills.

Broader Societal Level

At the societal level, education improves cognitive skills and knowledge, increasing individual labour market productivity. It also leads to health improvements, as educated individuals can better understand and carry out medical instructions, which can reduce government healthcare spending. Furthermore, education enhances the skills which are appropriate for legitimate work, promotes problem-solving skills, patience, and understanding of consequences, lowering crime rates. Closing, educated citizens are more informed, tolerant and thus more likely to participate in democratic processes.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

United Nations (UN)

In its fight towards SDG4, The UN has been an active leader in the fight against educational inequalities through agencies such as the UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and UNESCO. UNESCO develops inclusive policies, provides technical support to countries, promotes international legal frameworks, and attempts to leverage digital technologies in order to improve access to education. For example, the Global Education Monitoring Report, tracks the progress on educational quality and inclusivity, making evidence based recommendations.⁸ Despite these efforts, progress towards SDG4 is still being slowed down mostly due to funding gaps, and persistent inequalities. Similarly, UNICEF advocates for policy changes, provides technical support to governments, and implements programmes to help vulnerable children. For example, the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) by UNICEF, is the global fund for education emergencies in prolonged crises and rebuilds classrooms, supplies learning materials,⁹ and trains teachers in areas such as Yemen¹⁰ and Syria.¹¹

Norway

Norway, a leading example of effective education policies, is one of the biggest donors to international education initiatives. It has allocated 45 Million US Dollars in 3 years to UNESCO,¹² and 500 million Norwegian NOK to ECW.¹³ The Education Act (1998), mandates a 10 year compulsory education for all children starting at 6, further strengthened by the New Education Act (2024). Under this, schools now have the legal duty to track when students are absent and follow up on them.¹⁴

Afghanistan

After the Taliban retook control of the country in 2021, Afghanistan's educational system faces a severe crisis, in particular for girls. Since September of 2021 all girls have been banned from secondary

schooling, making Afghanistan the only country with such a restriction. In fact, according to UNESCO, 2.2 million women are restricted from attending school beyond primary education due to the Taliban restrictions.¹⁵

Figure 1: Percentage of children in Afghanistan enrolled at primary and secondary schools

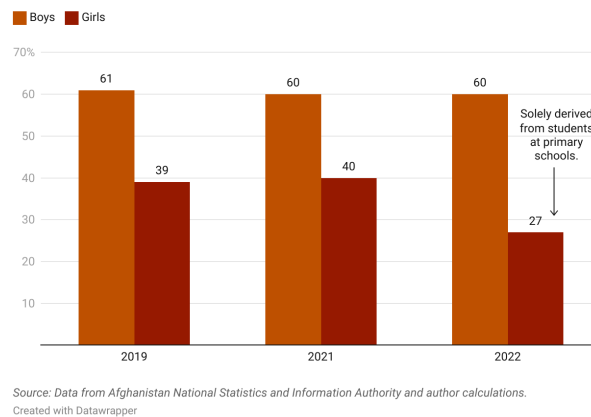


Figure 2: Graph showing the percentage of Afghan children, by gender, enrolled in elementary and secondary education.¹⁶

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
August 1991	The BuildOn Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) was launched, which builds houses in LEDCs. ¹⁷
November 1992	The First Book NGO, which provides books and other resources to students in the United States of America (USA) and Canada, was launched. ¹⁸
June 17th, 1998	The first Norway Education Act was passed. ¹⁹
June 18th, 2008	The resolution “The right to education”, A/HRC/RES/8/4, was adopted by the UNHRC. ²⁰
September 25th, 2015	The resolution “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, A/RES/70/1, was adopted by the UNGA. This officially adopted the 17 SDGs, including the 4th about quality education. ²¹
January 1st, 2016	The 17 SDGs came into force. ²²
January 31st, 2016	The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) was adopted by the African Union (AU). ²³

August 2020	Malawi's Education Sector plan was published. ²⁴
May 28th, 2020	The resolution named "International day to protect Education from Attack", A/RES/74/275, was adopted by the UNGA reaffirming the universal right to education. ²⁵
August 15th, 2021	The Taliban retook control of Afghanistan. ²⁶
August 1st, 2024	The New Education Act was passed in Norway. ²⁷

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

UN Resolutions

- United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/8/4 (2008): stresses the importance of making education accessible and provides a framework for Member States to ensure the full adoption of this as a human right.²⁸
- General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1 (2015): "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". This officially adopted the 17 SDGs, including the 4th about quality education.²⁹
- General Assembly Resolution A/RES/74/275 (2020): "International day to protect Education from Attack". This reaffirms the universal right to education and urges Member States to ensure it.³⁰

Attempts by Other Organisations

- African Union (AU): coordinates its member states to achieve the educational goals of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA), including financing education, and developing capabilities.³¹
- BuildOn Organisation: Assists in building of schools in LEDCs, having assisted in 3,000 so far.³²
- First Book Organisation: Provides books and other materials to students in the USA and Canada.³³



Figure 3: A school built by BuildOn in an LEDC.³⁴

Attempts by UN Member States

- Poland: Their national textbook programme provides textbooks for education to every child.³⁵
- Malawi: They have passed the National Education Sector Plan, aiming to ensure equitable access to education.³⁶
- USA: The National Book foundation of the country runs the Book Rich Environments programme, which provides free books to children in public housing communities.³⁷

Possible Solutions

With support from UNESCO and UNICEF, the following solutions could be very successful in making education more fair and accessible for everyone.

Support technology-based education initiatives

Since geographical reasons are one of the most prominent factors of educational inequality, by investing in technology-based initiatives, children can attend school online, without having to leave their home. These will be easy to use digital classrooms. Even though online schooling cannot fully imitate the social and hands-on experiences of live schools, it ensures that all children can be part of primary and secondary education.

Establishing teacher training workshops

A possible solution to tackle teacher shortage would be to establish some workshops which will train willing members of these communities, who do not have acquired a formal teaching degree, to teach to younger students. These teachers will not obtain all the qualities that teachers with a formal degree have, but with the workshops that they can be supplied with the essential knowledge and

pedagogical techniques required to provide basic, quality education.

Creating a global education fund by awareness campaigns

Another possible solution could be to create a global education fund, which will finance projects that aim for education to become accessible for all. The funds for this would come from awareness campaigns, conducted either by NGOs, or governments. It will give grants to schools and community programmes to cover school fees, learning resources, and teacher training. This could be done with the help of the World Bank, who would monitor this fund.

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