

Chapter **7**

Gendered strategies for EFA

The world as a whole is moving closer to reaching the EFA goals and there are many successes to acclaim. There have been major strides towards UPE, as measured by net enrolments, in South and West Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and in some of the Arab States. There has also been a strong global move towards greater gender parity, particularly at primary level, where the proportion of girls to boys enrolled has improved from 88% to 94% over the past decade. But many countries, despite great efforts, have made little progress. Population growth has remained strong and, partly because of this, the number of the world's children who remain out of school declined only marginally – by about 3% – over the decade. Furthermore, the gender balance at higher levels of schooling in the poorer developing countries is strongly dominated by boys and much remains to be done to achieve gender equality in education in most parts of the world. This final chapter focuses on future national and international strategies to achieve EFA, with particular emphasis on the gender goals.

Gender inequality in education entails serious losses for society.

Quantitative aspects of progress

The overriding case for achieving equal access to, and treatment within, education derives from principles of human rights, which are clearly enshrined and accepted internationally. In addition, however, gender inequality in education entails serious losses for society. Where girls and women are more educationally disadvantaged than boys and men, shifting the balance towards girls will, over the medium term, improve economic growth, increase farm output and the incomes of the poorest, nourish citizenship, enhance the well-being of children, reduce fertility, and improve the prospects for future generations. For a large range of reasons, removal of gender gaps in education should have first priority in all programmes of expansion and qualitative improvement.

This report demonstrates the extent to which such changes in direction are required. The gender goal for 2005 aims to achieve parity in primary and secondary enrolments by that date. Chapter 2 shows that 52 out of 128 countries have achieved this goal, or are likely to do so by the intended date. The goal is likely to be missed, however, by more than half of these countries, one-third of which are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Twenty-two of those countries that will miss the 2005 goal should be able to achieve parity by 2015, but fifty-four of them (two-fifths of the total) are unlikely, on present trends, to achieve parity even by then. In most of these cases, secondary schooling is the lagging subsector. These countries are concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa (sixteen), and in East Asia and the Pacific (eleven), and they include China and India.

Gender disparities in enrolments are overwhelmingly in favour of boys. In a significant minority of countries they favour girls – mainly in Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and some southern states in sub-Saharan Africa. These disparities are usually small and they are concentrated at secondary level. However, they have often been worsening in recent years, and they will require policy attention if shifts back towards parity are to be achieved.

This report uses a new Education for All Development Index (EDI) to provide a summary measure of progress towards EFA. It incorporates

proxy measures for UPE, gender parity, adult literacy and school quality. Each of these elements are given equal weight, and the index can thus be used as a rough indication of the 'average' extent of national progress towards four of the six EFA goals. No attempt has been made to project values of the index to 2015, because at present only around half of all countries can be included in it, owing to lack of data. However, a cursory inspection of current values, for those countries represented, indicates that a major challenge exists. Only sixteen countries, from the ninety-four for which data are available, have achieved the four goals, or are close to doing so (having an EDI of 0.95 or higher). No country from South and West Asia (except Maldives), sub-Saharan Africa or the Arab States is yet in that category. Furthermore, more than one-third of the countries have EDI values lower than 0.80, indicating that they have far to go to reach EFA.

It must be emphasized, however, that rapid progress towards EFA can be made by these countries. Planning and policy reform is capable of bringing many nations closer to achieving EFA over the next decade, provided that it is supplemented by strong external support from the aid community. As regards the gender goals, even for those countries likely to fail to reach gender parity at primary and secondary levels by 2005, policies are available to speed up their transition, and in such circumstances their longer-term prospects to 2015 are more promising.

Gender-aware strategy for education

Context matters

Effective policy design obviously requires an understanding of the extent and nature of the problems to be addressed. This report shows that gender inequality is usually deeply rooted, and inequality in educational participation and outcomes reflects broader inequalities in society. Social norms and customs create powerful incentives that guide people's behaviour, and determine the roles that women and men can have in the family and community. Social norms are embedded in kinship and religious systems that are highly diverse across – and often within – societies. But such norms can and do change –

in response to environmental and economic change and to broader political and social developments. Change can result from deliberate actions of state or civil society organizations, and from legislative and institutional social reforms. These can influence the expectations and incentives governing human behaviour – including those affecting educational participation and performance.

Decisions about participation in schooling are made by families. It is here that notions of gender relations are transmitted from one generation to the next. This happens implicitly via the gender roles that members of the household themselves fulfil, and explicitly through the gender frameworks within which children of each sex are brought up. Households allocate time for different activities among their members, and they also allocate resources – for consumption, savings and investment, including those associated with the formation of human capital – between each of them. These allocations are influenced by the broad social and institutional framework of custom and opportunity in which households are located. But changing the factors that affect household constraints, opportunities and incentives is a critically important means of influencing their decision-making.

Role of the state

The state's role in this is important in at least three principal ways: *creating an enabling environment* for promoting gender equality in education through legislative and policy reform; *investing in redistribution*, by targeting resources for female education and introducing special measures to reduce inequities; and *mitigating the burden of external shocks* on girls and women, such as the effects of conflict, economic crisis and HIV/AIDS. Although changes to education policy are critically important, in order to be successful, actions to promote gender parity and equality in education need to be nested within a wider set of measures affecting many other aspects of economy and society.

Creating an enabling environment

Legislative reform

Most nations are signatories to human rights treaties that guarantee equal access to education. However this report shows that national reporting to treaty bodies is often slow

and implementation is patchy. In order to improve equality in education, a broad and supportive national legal framework is required. This should go beyond the establishment of compulsory schooling legislation, which is often ineffective in the absence of more broadly based rights protection. Legal measures which ensure that women enjoy non-discrimination and protect their fundamental freedoms are necessary bases for gender equality. The establishment of property rights is a crucial element in securing economic and social justice for women. Reforms may also be required in family law, to influence behaviour where the impact of customs and social norms may otherwise be decisive. The agenda here covers aspects of marriage rights, control of property, divorce, custody and inheritance. These are often deeply controversial issues as they affect many aspects of the relationship between men and women and their respective rights over children. However, they can provide a decisive counterweight to the influence of social norms on life decisions – including those which affect whether or not children are sent to school.

Mainstreaming gender within institutions

Both women's and men's interests need to be explicitly considered in the design of all legislation, policies and programmes. The overall objective of this kind of 'mainstreaming' is to ensure that women and men benefit equally, and that inequality is not perpetuated. It means that all development decisions and interventions need to be gender aware. It carries implications for the staffing, procedures and culture of all institutions as well as for the programmes that they run. In the past, gender issues in aid dialogue and within aid agencies themselves have often been vaguely specified – too inconsistently to achieve solid results. In national governments, dedicated 'gender units' have often been understaffed, underfinanced and lacking in real authority.

In most countries, a strong general policy on gender equality is required at national level. This can inform practice throughout the administration and at sectoral levels. Policy development needs sex-disaggregated data and analytical information, made easily available. 'Champions of change', preferably at senior levels of the bureaucracy, are needed to build support and provide an example. Many female ministers of education have provided excellent examples of what can be done. But they need to

All development decisions and interventions need to be gender-aware.

NGOs are generally committed to ensuring that education reaches the poorest and most disadvantaged groups.

be more widely spread within governments. Capacity needs to be built in government and CSOs to allow groups campaigning for gender equality to engage with the national policy process.

Encouraging NGOs

In most countries in the developing world, non-state providers have had a longer engagement with education service provision than the state itself. As pressures to expand have increased, particularly where the adjustment burden has been intense, non-state providers have become an attractive option in several countries. This can work to the advantage of girls. NGOs can be major contributors and they are generally committed to ensuring that education reaches the poorest and most disadvantaged groups. Many of the most innovative educational experiments which have focused on girls' enrolments have been undertaken by NGOs. Religious providers are also long-established in many parts of the world, and have often been responsible for ensuring an education for otherwise excluded groups, including girls. However, they are usually conservative organizations, tending to reinforce, rather than undermine, local gender stereotypes. Their activities may help to attain gender parity in education, but they have sometimes made equality more distant. Both private-sector and community schools are also active in many countries. Here, the costs of attendance are often significant and their impact on gender parity and equality in education is often less positive. On balance, then, NGO activities can be a useful complement to state endeavours, but the activities of other providers have a less certain impact on equality. Policies need to be informed by an assessment of gender impact, as regards both the access of girls to these forms of schooling, and the relative quality of different schooling models.

Investing in redistribution

Many households find it difficult to send all their children to school. Their incomes are too low to afford the costs involved. Changing the costs – including the opportunity costs – of school attendance and their incidence between the sexes is necessary in these circumstances. This is particularly so in poor communities, and where parents can expect to receive more future income from their educated sons than from similarly educated daughters. Equalizing the benefits that arise from schooling is a more

fundamental process, founded upon achieving a society and labour market free from discrimination such that the opportunities and advantages faced by all children at given levels of education and achievement are broadly equal.

School fees

The direct and indirect costs of schooling to households include, but are not limited to, the fees charged by schools or governments for school attendance. Abolishing primary-school fees can have a major impact on boosting the enrolment of both girls and boys. Where they still exist at primary level – as they often do in the form of charges for books, equipment, or participation in sports, if not for tuition – they need to be removed.

Table 7.1 shows that primary-school fees are still charged in twenty-six of the thirty-four countries (excluding Macao, China) that are unlikely to reach the gender goal for primary schooling in 2005. It can also be seen that fourteen of these 'at risk' countries, all of which charge fees, have net enrolment ratios of less than 80%.

The removal of school fees in these countries would probably be the single most effective means of raising primary enrolments and reducing gender disparities in the short term. This would, of course, imply increased costs to the state for each and every child enrolled in school, and there would be an additional cost impact arising from the enrolment increases themselves. The fee element of total costs varies substantially between countries, and no dependable data are available on a comparative international basis. Rough estimates, based on national studies, suggest that fees – where they are charged – account for 5%–15% of unit costs in typical cases. The enrolment impact will also vary, depending on base-year NER levels, but, in some cases, its accommodation would alone require a major increase in public spending on primary schooling.

The experience of a number of African countries where fees have recently been abolished suggests that, at least where they represent a significant proportion of household schooling costs, it would be best for their removal to be phased over a (short) number of years. The negative impact on school quality of large proportionate increases in primary enrolments in any one year can be substantial. New classrooms

have to be built, teachers trained, equipment purchased – all of which take more than a few months to provide. In their absence, the increased enrolments cause class sizes to increase, sometimes to insupportable levels, and the quality of learning can be badly affected. If the necessary resources to support the expanded primary system are not forthcoming it will not be long before enrolments again begin to decline. Experience shows that early candidates for dropping out, in such circumstances, will be girls. Accordingly, it is critically important that governments budget carefully for the increased financial costs implied by the removal of fees, and plan for the provision of the additional physical and human resources necessary to underpin schooling of an acceptable quality, in the context of rapid expansion. Programmes of international co-operation would be ideal instruments to help to bridge the resource gaps involved in these cases.

Measures to reduce child labour

Eliminating the fee aspects of direct costs is only one, albeit important, part of the challenge of achieving gender parity and equality in education. Tackling the opportunity costs is equally important. This report shows that the need for children to work – the source of the opportunity costs of school attendance – is one of the most important causes of under-enrolment in school. Accordingly, measures to reduce or remove the need for child labour represent, in many countries, an important means of increasing school enrolments among both girls and boys.

The design of policy to address child labour depends on recognizing that most children work with or for their parents in economies where markets are underdeveloped and where the legal and political infrastructure is thin. Bans on the worst forms of child labour are needed in all countries, where existing legislation is inadequate. Where such work continues to be allowed, trade sanctions are required at the international level. Pressure to apply international labour standards and the introduction of minimum wages is needed to combat the incidence of child factory workers. But, in order to reduce the extent of child labour in households and on family farms, additional measures are required.

As regards long-term changes, measures to raise the productivity and hence the wages of adult

Table 7.1. School fees in countries at risk of not achieving gender parity in primary schooling

Gender parity prospects	Primary school fees charged		Primary NER 2000
	Yes	No	
<i>Likely to miss parity in 2005, but to achieve it by 2015</i>			
Algeria ²		X	98.3
Benin ¹	X		70.3**
Cambodia ²	X		85.4**
Chad ²	X		58.2
Comoros ²	X		56.2**
Congo ²	X		n.a.
Cuba ²		X	97.3
Ghana ²	X		58.2
Lao People's Democratic Republic	X		81.4
Paraguay ²	X		92.1**
Sudan ²	X		49.5**
Syrian Arab Republic ²		X	96.3**
Togo	X		91.2
Uganda		X	n.a.
<i>At risk of not achieving parity in 2015</i>			
Burkina Faso	X		35.5
Burundi	X		53.7
Côte d'Ivoire	X		62.2
Djibouti	X		32.6**
Estonia		X	97.6
Ethiopia	X		46.7
India		X	85.7
Iraq ¹		X	92.9
Kyrgyzstan ²	X		82.5
Macao, China	n.a.	n.a.	84.8
Madagascar ²	X		67.7
Mongolia ²	X		88.8
Mozambique	X		54.4
Niger ²	X		30.4
Papua New Guinea ¹	X		83.8**
Saint Lucia	X		99.7
Sierra Leone	X		65.2
South Africa	X		88.9**
Swaziland	X		92.8**
Thailand		X	85.4**
Turkey ²	X		n.a.
Total countries (excluding Macao, China)	26	8	

Notes:

1. Data in italics are for 1999/2000.

2. Countries with legal guarantee of free education.

** UIS estimate

Sources: Tables 2.25, 3.3, and Statistical annex, Table 5.

labour will reduce the need to depend on the labour of children. In addition, any measures that reduce discrimination in employment or wages against women will, by raising the return to girls' education, discourage child labour among girls.

Where the main cause of child labour is the returns from such work compared with those

Measures to encourage increased participation of women in the labour market will also increase their say in the household.

from schooling, investments in the quality of schooling will pay off. Further, for girls to reap the (pecuniary) benefits of their education over the long run, measures need to be taken to reduce labour market segmentation (where males and females typically do different sorts of work) as well as wage discrimination. Regulatory measures to stop such practices are difficult to enforce in rural economies. Thus, social mobilization, education and the organization of women are more likely to bring about an equalization of these differences than legislation per se. Measures to encourage increased participation of women in the labour market will also increase their say in household decision-making and their control over resources. As such, women appear to spend more resources on children than do men. This may be expected to further encourage the education of the next generation of children. The new role models implied by these changes would also be likely to lead to the impact on girls being larger than on boys.

Policies can also be designed specifically to provide parents with incentives to send their children to school. Financial incentives such as cash transfers to cover the forgone 'wage' of the child are often relevant even where household poverty is not compelling. In such cases, these transfers can be made conditional on school attendance, as has happened in a number of successful schemes discussed in Chapter 4 of this report. Scholarship programmes, and – under closely managed circumstances – school feeding programmes can both provide targeted support to secure higher school attendance of girls.

Finally, one major problem in assessing the degree to which policy change is required is that the extent of domestic child labour is largely unknown. Because much of this work remains hidden, a priority is to increase the availability of data and knowledge about its extent and characteristics. This aspect of child labour demands urgent attention, as the nature and extent of exploitation involved is difficult to assess and combat. The vast majority of children affected are girls.

Ensuring gender-aware curricula and school facilities

Schools should be places where gender stereotypes are undermined. However, everyday classroom practices often reinforce traditional gender differences. Teacher training rarely

focuses on gender awareness. Thus, ideas that girls are less intelligent and less likely to do well than boys are not uncommonly held by teachers. Sexism in textbooks, with girls being portrayed only in traditional caring roles, remains common. Such expectations – held by teachers and implied by teaching materials – confirm rather than undermine the status quo. Curricula need to be audited from a gender perspective and, where necessary, redesigned in a gender-aware fashion. Gender training for teachers should be an essential prerequisite for their appointment. Measures to ensure a gender balance in the teaching profession, and within individual schools, will help to provide positive role models for both girls and boys.

Particularly in the poorest countries, classroom equipment and school availability can make attendance more difficult for girls. The absence of private sanitary facilities, of desks and chairs, even of nearby running water, all help to dissuade girls from attending. The distance from home to school is a greater barrier for safety-conscious parents. Thus the prevalence of distant schools with poor facilities are additional constraints acting to reduce the participation of girls in school, and their performance once enrolled. School mapping, and the provision of school facilities and equipment, in the context of an acceptable class size, should be conscious of explicit gender perspectives and criteria. A different set of biases affects girls suffering from disability. They appear to be less recognized than their male counterparts, they are less likely to be provided with medical support and, in many developing countries, their education is largely ignored.

Tackling crisis and shocks

There are important contextual factors that go beyond questions of norms, customs and incentives. These factors include the effects of HIV/AIDS, of armed conflict, and of a culture of violence in schools, each of which has serious implications for the education of girls and for their futures. They deeply affect whether or not many girls go to school at all and, if they do, whether they drop out early or underperform while attending.

HIV/AIDS

The impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic affects adolescent girls much more than boys: they have higher rates of infection and they have greater

care and work responsibilities than boys when their families are affected by illness. It is a responsibility of schools to seek to empower learners to live sexually responsible and healthy lives. In that context, HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education should be a professional subject area in its own right within the curriculum. Teacher training in these skills is a critical need as many teachers are reluctant to deal with sensitive and, in some cases, taboo topics. As part of such support, accurate and high-quality teaching and learning materials, and systems of back-up guidance need to be in place. Curriculum changes per se will remain weak in the absence of a fully professionalized response to integration of HIV/AIDS into school programmes.

Conflict

Armed conflict has also affected many of the poorest countries over the past decade. It has been particularly disruptive for the education of girls, who become more vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation in such circumstances. The increased danger means that they are more likely to be kept at home. A majority of refugees are women and girls, whose risks, if anything, are enhanced in typical circumstances of displacement. This is a major problem for which there are emerging lessons of good practice, but no easy solutions. The general issue was covered in some detail in the *EFA Report 2002* (UNESCO, 2002, pp. 122–6, 157–62). The report concluded that solutions are best found within the affected communities. Locally established school or community education committees can be the vehicle for organizing labour to erect temporary facilities. They can help to identify and appoint experienced teachers, social workers, project managers and supervisors for projects and in schools supported by internal or external resources. However, gender considerations add to the complexities already faced by most conventional programmes of response. Children affected by crisis and conflict have special needs for good teaching to help them rebuild a sense of self-esteem. They need extra emotional support – particularly where they have lost close family members. They need opportunities for safe recreation, with teachers and leaders who do not represent additional sources of threat. Such children need care and support which go well beyond the expectations of school personnel operating in more ‘normal’ conditions. There is usually a major need for trained workers to help

respond to the enhanced vulnerability of girls in these circumstances.

Preventing violence in schools

Schools are supposed to be places of learning, growth and empowerment, yet they can often be sites of intolerance, discrimination and violence, with girls being disproportionately the victims. Closing the gender gap requires confronting the sexual violence and harassment that leads to underachievement and high drop-out rates among girls. Gender-based violence in schools exists in all parts of the world. Much of the most innovative work to counter it has been initiated by NGOs, often in connection with HIV/AIDS education. This has often occurred outside the formal school setting – in part because ministries of education have been reluctant to address this issue. Where school authorities have failed to acknowledge its existence, it has often flourished and become institutionalized. Efforts are needed to empower girls and women and to sensitize men to the needs and rights of girls and women. Vigorous action is needed, bringing together students, parents, teachers and school administrators, to protect girl pupils from harassment, sexual assault and rape.

Closing the gender gap requires confronting sexual violence and harassment in schools.

National strategies for EFA

The role of the state is central if good-quality basic education is to become both a right and a reality for every citizen. EFA requires enforceable legislation, equitable long-term investments and well-managed, technically sound education strategies. Non-governmental and community provision and private-sector investment have their place in education but they cannot provide a long-term substitute for state action and responsibility.

What makes the difference?

There is no single recipe for achieving EFA. Patterns of poverty, of access to education and of educational quality differ enormously between and within countries. These different circumstances require diverse strategies tailored to need and local conditions. Very small states (forty-three countries have a population of below 500,000) are often constrained in the range of educational opportunities that they can provide, leading to hard choices about national versus international

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provision. Those countries confronted by HIV/AIDS and by conflict are having to rethink traditional approaches to the provision of schooling, notwithstanding that their societies lack stability and, at worst, even hope for their future.

Nevertheless, in broad terms, this report suggests that there are some common factors among those countries making more rapid progress. Moves towards EFA appear to be stronger in more democratic states and in those with a stronger institutional base. Economic growth supports progress towards EFA, particularly where institutions are working well. Domestic educational expenditure is also found to support progress towards EFA in poorer and more democratic states. In these contexts, extra investment is likely to have greater impact than in richer countries, where access to good-quality education is already high. Increased aid also makes a difference if there are effective institutional structures. There are obviously exceptions to these generalizations. However, they serve to emphasize the importance of reform, investment and institutional development as means of securing rapid progress towards EFA.

Movement towards reform

Targets can help with the process of reform. The evidence in this report suggests a growing commitment to the EFA goals and to the MDGs, allied to a willingness to undertake the types of institutional reform and the investment decisions that will be required over the next decade. Some large countries, such as Brazil and India, have already injected urgency into their determination to reach significant medium-term EFA targets, supported by new legislation and policy change. Targets help if they stimulate planning attention and if, via a public process, they heighten the accountability of government.

In this context, the place of civil society in support of education is receiving much more attention than hitherto, even in countries where there has been little tradition of public action or social movements outside formal political frameworks. However, its contributions to the articulation of policy and practice in education are mixed. This is partly because the transition from providing education through non-governmental channels to sitting at national and local policy tables is not easy, either for government or CSOs themselves.

Greater participation and accountability in education and the decentralization of education services are increasingly linked. It is estimated that 80% of developing and transition countries are experimenting with some form of decentralization. This takes many forms, but it commonly involves a shift in the locus of management responsibility from the centre towards schools and other education institutions. It is not yet clear whether decentralization, in whatever form, results in better learning outcomes. More evidence and analysis of this issue is needed.

Reference has already been made, earlier in this chapter, to the critical importance of making education – especially primary education – affordable for everyone. A significant number of governments have accepted that direct charges and fees should not be a barrier to education. How this breakthrough is to be put into practice requires some difficult judgements, particularly if the immediate expansion of enrolments is not to prejudice better quality. Nevertheless the acceptance that ‘free’ education is a central plank of government policy is an extremely important component of a national EFA strategy.

Meeting international commitments

The aid record during the 1990s was dismal, and aid to education reflected the overall trend – falling by up to one-fifth in real terms over the period 1990–2001. Even in very recent years the trend remained in place, with both bilateral and multilateral aid to education decreasing by about 15% between 1998/99 and 2000/01. On the other hand, it seems that commitments for basic education over the same period increased by about one-fifth, to about US\$1.5 billion. This is to be welcomed, but it still falls far short of the likely additional aid requirements for basic education of around US\$5.6 billion per year needed to reach universal enrolment in primary education with gender parity in schools of acceptable quality.¹

Sub-Saharan Africa receives just over one-quarter of bilateral aid to education, whereas South and West Asia (having one-third of the world’s out-of-school children) receives only about one-tenth of the total. Similar regional priorities characterize multilateral aid, although

1. This is the annual additional amount of aid required, as estimated by UNESCO (2002).

up to one-third of IDA funding for education goes to South Asia.

In general, education aid appears to be attracted by better-performing systems. An analysis of flows to 77 countries shows that the amount of aid per out-of-school child increases sharply with the level of net enrolment. Similarly, for 120 countries, those with higher literacy rates receive considerably more aid per illiterate adult than those with lower literacy, where the priority for aid ought to be higher. Thus, education aid is not sufficiently focused on the countries that need it most. It has been falling overall, and the efficiency of allocation, taking a global view of need, is low.

Attainment of the EFA goals requires a substantial increase in aid to basic education. However, aid alone will be insufficient. Increased financial transfers to countries which have poor policies, and a weak institutional environment, are unlikely to pay dividends for EFA. History also shows that the diffuse objectives of agencies, the different modalities under which aid is provided, and its poor co-ordination within developing countries, often undermine aid effectiveness. The recent inception and development of the Fast-Track Initiative (FTI), designed to help achieve UPE by 2015, has highlighted the difficulties of securing a more effective use of international resources, whether financial flows or technical assistance.

The FTI is a response to the sense of urgency created by the World Education Forum in 2000. By mid-2003, some US\$207 million had been committed to the FTI. This is a very modest contribution in comparison with the annual additional aid required for EFA. Furthermore, it is not clear whether all these funds represent new, as distinct from repackaged, aid allocations to education. Why is this so? Why has there been unwillingness on the part of most funding agencies to give strong support to this global initiative?

The answer seems to derive partly from concern about whether a multilateral initiative is the best way of using scarce aid resources. Despite their stated support for the FTI, a number of influential bilateral agencies seem to retain strong doubts about the effectiveness of special multilateral initiatives, preferring more direct interventions within countries. Secondly, some agencies ask whether a separate, subsector initiative will be at

odds with programmes of ongoing budgetary support or with Sector-Wide Approaches. Indeed, much of the discussion to develop a Framework for the Initiative has sought to ensure that parallel planning processes do not emerge, so that assistance from the FTI can clearly add value to existing sector plans and reforms. A third issue concerns the extent to which global initiatives concentrate power and influence at the international rather than the national level. The FTI should be seen to work in support of national planning and reform, backed by an international forum and resource, which genuinely support the process.

The FTI has reached a critical point in its development. Bilateral agencies need to decide whether their formal support can be translated into a significant commitment of resources. Otherwise this major post-Dakar initiative is in danger of failure, damaging trust and international co-operation more generally. If the current FTI model is judged unworkable, the question as to how funding agencies propose to allocate the resources required for EFA will need to be urgently addressed. The historical record strongly suggests that bilateral initiatives will be insufficient. If the FTI were to fail, it would probably need to be reinvented if the educational goals are to be reached.

In any case, a major effort in international co-operation is needed to support the poorest group of countries that are furthest from EFA. Using gender as a leading edge for this support – in countries currently with low NERs and major gender disparity in school enrolments and literacy – would be a substantial contribution. As this report demonstrates, adopting a gender criterion is a very effective way of reaching the poorest households. An important component of this could be the elimination of school fees and other, more targeted, interventions.

It is difficult to separate an assessment of the FTI from the broader issues of co-ordination. This report separately examines aid flows, international initiatives, and EFA co-ordination, reflecting the responsibilities of different institutions. Ideally, they should be united. UNESCO has a major responsibility in this respect but continues to find it difficult to enhance its normative and representational functions in ways that would achieve more genuine international influence. The mechanisms

Adopting a gender criterion is a very effective way of reaching the poorest households.

instituted post-Dakar – the Director-General’s EFA High-Level Group and the Working Group on EFA – provide an opportunity to share information and experience, but their influence on levels of aid, enhanced political commitment and the better use of international resources has so far been limited. Such influence could, however, be gained if their objectives and linkages with the United Nations and other international institutions were strengthened. An early review of these mechanisms would be helpful.

Looking forward

The future development of a large number of countries depends crucially upon EFA becoming an accepted priority and, within that, upon the gender goals being met. The handicap to the realisation of gender equality in and through education is neither a lack of knowledge nor of policy options. The main requirement is to bring the necessary political commitment, expertise and resources together in order to respond to the urgency and centrality of the task. As this report demonstrates, this is happening in some countries, bringing benefits that are clear, and sometimes rapid. For the international community, the challenge remains – as in Dakar – to respond to the scale and urgency of the challenge of EFA in a truly cooperative way. Secretary General Kofi Annan characterised the World Education Forum as *a test for all of us who call ourselves the international community... a test we must pass*. Four years later, a significantly enhanced level of well-targeted resources and action are required to secure a genuine education for all, which closes the gender gap in education, and empowers girls and women today, and over future generations. ■