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**Role of the United Nations system in implementing the
internationally agreed development goals and commitments in
regard to education**

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report presents an overview of the activities carried out by the UN system in ensuring follow-up to the Ministerial Declaration adopted by the Council in 2011. The approach selected for this report is the review of joint initiatives taken by UN system entities and their partnerships with other actors. The report includes analyses of existing partnerships and proposals to enhance such partnerships with civil society and the private sector. Such efforts, which have the potential to be transformational, are also presented in the context of ongoing reflections on the international agenda in this area, including emerging trends, possible targets, and new thoughts on the content of educational policy, marked by an increased focus on the quality of education and the need to improve the nexus between education, training and the world of work.

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I. Introduction

In its resolution 2008/29, the Council decided that its coordination segment should be devoted to the review of the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration adopted at the previous year's Annual Ministerial Review. The 2012 coordination segment will therefore focus on the theme "Implementing the internationally agreed development goals and commitments in regard to education" and will review the role of the United Nations system in this regard.

The present report presents a review of UN system activities in the field of education through the angle of coordinated and/or joint initiatives. It is based on contributions provided by UN agencies and offices. The role and views of UNESCO and UNICEF, two major UN actors in this area of work, are particularly highlighted. The report addresses how partnerships with other UN system organizations and non-UN actors have enhanced international action in the field of education. Particular attention is given to those partnerships aimed at accelerating progress towards MDG2, Education for All and related goals.

The report is produced at a time when the United Nations is engaged in a forward looking process to develop a system-wide vision and road map for the UN development agenda beyond 2015. The outcome of the Conference on sustainable development (Rio+20) in terms of sustainable development objectives and programmes may also have implications for the education for all goals going forward. In this context, the report devotes its last section to emerging trends, challenges and perspectives with regard to education and their potential impact on the definition of future international action.

II. Strengthening UN interagency partnerships and coordination mechanisms for education

A. The Education for All Movement, a common platform for mobilizing stakeholders

The main mechanism around which UN agencies have developed and coordinated activities is the Education for All (EFA) movement, which is a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. Since the World Conference on Education in Dakar in 2000, a number of strategic initiatives and cooperation frameworks have emerged, involving a broad range of EFA stakeholders. One of the remarkable evolutions is the degree to which the EFA movement has become much more inclusive and participatory, engaging not just ministries of education but representatives from across society, from grassroots organization to global corporations.

The EFA convening agencies are UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and the World Bank. UNESCO was mandated to act as global coordinator of the EFA movement and was given the responsibility for a series of EFA coordination mechanisms, comprising the multi-stakeholder EFA High-Level Group (HLG) and Working Group (WG), and mechanisms for specific groups of stakeholders. Notable achievements of the

HLG include the launch of the Education for All Global Monitoring Report and the Task Force on Teachers for EFA.

Changes have appeared in the global context surrounding the EFA movement. In 2011, based on criticism that the above mechanisms did not succeed in mobilizing sufficient high level support, UNESCO made a review of the existing global EFA coordination architecture and put in place a revised mechanism. The objectives of this new mechanism are to ensure stronger linkages between national, regional and global EFA activities; to mobilize high-level political support through an annual EFA High-Level Forum; and to assess progress towards EFA in an annual Global EFA Meeting and provide strategic guidance through an EFA Steering Committee. All stakeholders are included in these structures to ensure effectiveness, ownership and accountability.

The global and regional EFA coordination has facilitated the sharing of information, expertise and networks among countries, the different UN agencies as well as other EFA stakeholders. A division of roles and responsibilities has emerged, with UNESCO facilitating monitoring of progress towards the EFA goals through the annual EFA Global Monitoring Report. The Global Partnership for Education (former Fast Track Initiative) has focused on mobilizing funding, and a number of thematic partnerships and initiatives have focused on advocacy on specific aspects of EFA. Regional EFA working groups have been established. For example, the Asia-Pacific working group includes ESCAP and regional organizations such as the Asian Development Bank and ASEAN.

B. Specific partnerships and initiatives

There are many specific partnerships and thematic initiatives that have been created since the World Education Forum in 2000. The partnerships are multi-stakeholder and often have one or two lead agencies providing the secretariat/coordination mechanism. Each tends to have its own governance system and to operate independently, providing opportunities for members to engage in policy-dialogue, knowledge creation and sharing, advocacy and mobilization of support. Some thematic initiatives focus on specific groups of vulnerable children (e.g. the Global Task Force on Child Labour and Education), while others focus on international development themes and the content of education (e.g. the UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team on Education and the World Programme for Human Rights Education) and constraints on access to education (e.g. the School Fee Abolition Initiative and the School Feeding Programmes).

Flagship partnerships and initiatives of EFA include the Consultative Group on Early Childhood (CGECCD), the Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities (RtE), Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD). Some partnerships are hereunder presented in more detail.

In 2002, the *Global Partnership for Education* (GPE) (former Fast Track Initiative) was created to accelerate progress towards universal primary education. The partnership is a 'compact' for financing policies and sector programs for EFA at the country level and operates under the policy guidance of a Board of Directors, consisting

of representatives of developing countries, donors, civil society, teachers unions, private sector and multilateral agencies. In a replenishment conference in November 2011 close to 1,54 billion USD were pledged to the initiative. The GPE Secretariat is supported by the World Bank and the Chair of the Board of Directors is hosted by UNESCO.

The *United Nations Girls' Education Initiative* (UNGEI) is one of the original EFA flagship programmes, launched in Dakar in 2000, and works to improve the quality and availability of girls' education. With UNICEF as the lead agency, UNGEI is a network of partners at all levels and is guided by a Global Advisory Committee, consisting of representatives of international organisations, civil society, private sector and donors. It aims at closing the gender gap in primary and secondary education by 2015.

The *UN Adolescent Girls Task Force*, co-chaired by UNFPA and UNICEF, in partnership with ILO, UNESCO, UNICEF, UN-Women, UNHCR and WHO, mobilizes partners to promote their rights, including to health and education, and to promote adolescent girl leaders. In the field of education, it focuses on quality education and school completion, particularly girls' transition from primary to post-primary education and training.

The *Evidence and Data for Gender Equality* (EDGE) initiative, co-managed by UN-Women and the Statistics Division of UN DESA, seeks to push existing efforts to have comparable gender indicators on education, employment, entrepreneurship and assets, and will develop a database for international data and metadata compilation in these fields.

The *Focusing Resources on Effective School Health Framework* (FRESH), within which WFP, WHO and UNICEF work together, aims to achieve more child-friendly schools, through health-related school policies, provision of safe water and sanitation, skills-based health education, and school-based health and nutrition services. School meal programmes, for example, act as a safety net for poor families and help keep children in school, in particular girls. FRESH has also promoted the use of WFP provided meals as a platform for WHO de-worming programmes, that make sure vital nutrients from food are well absorbed and utilized for growth and development. Under this framework, WFP and the World Bank have also partnered around the concept of 'rethinking school feeding for the 21st century' aiming at a worldwide transition towards nationally-owned and resourced school feeding programmes.

Led by UNICEF and Save the Children, the *IASC Education Cluster* serves to enhance capacity and preparedness of humanitarian personnel and government authorities to coordinate and manage educational programmes in emergencies.

The *Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies*, an open global network of representatives from various sectors, has recognized the fact that, in periods of conflict, education helps build social capital and cohesion and gives children a sense of structure and normalcy, while protecting them from harm, abduction and recruitment into

armed groups. In the aftermath of conflict, education is a key element for reconciliation and the rebuilding of trust. School feeding and other services are used to increase the impact of enhanced education. In addition, the ***Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack*** is a unique inter-agency coalition formed in 2010 to address the problem of targeted attacks on education during armed conflict.

Education for rural people (ERP) is a global partnership launched by FAO and UNESCO to remove barriers that prevent poor people from using their capacity, including the divide between urban-rural knowledge and education and training. It has allowed to mainstream ERP in the national and global policy agenda and successfully promoted intersectoral cooperation between ministries of agriculture and education.

The UN Inter-Agency Committee (IAC) for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) is a platform and collaboration mechanism that brings together 22 UN agencies to focus on the education dimensions of sustainable development and to promote a common vision for the UN system. It seeks to emphasize the role of ESD and its implications for all forms, levels and settings of education. For example, specific activities are carried out by UN Habitat in the field of health, water, sanitation and hygiene education (HWSHE) to promote value based water education.

The ***Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI)*** led by UNICEF and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) aims to reduce the number of out-of-school children and address disparities in access and attendance through policies and strategies for increased school participation for the marginalized, based on country-specific analysis of bottlenecks and barriers to school participation currently in 26 countries. In collaboration with the World Bank, UNICEF also began developing the Simulation for Equity in Education Model (SEE) which includes a bottleneck analysis and a database of effective strategies for improving both access and learning outcomes as well as a means to project marginal costs of these interventions (addressing both demand and supply) to reach groups of excluded children.

The ***School Fee Abolition Initiative (SFAI)*** launched jointly in 2005 by UNICEF and the World Bank is focused on developing an evidence base on the impact of school fee abolition; providing technical support to countries; and enhancing the global and national policy dialogue. Fee abolition has already resulted in substantive increase in total enrolment, particularly in African countries, and allowed the ratio of girls to boys enrolled in primary school to improve.

The Inter-agency Group on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (IAG-TVET) comprises the ILO, OECD, the World Bank and UNESCO. Regional Banks and organizations have also joined the Group. The IAG-TVET has provided key inputs to the G20 Training Strategy and Human Resource Development (HRD) action plan. Joint TVET country reviews and round-table discussions for a broad spectrum of stakeholders have been organized. Two technical groups have been established on the definition of key indicators for monitoring and evaluation of TVET and on 'Greening TVET and Skills Development'.

At the country level, the UN Delivering as One process has provided a platform for better coordination in several countries, promoting a division of labour based on the comparative advantages of the different UN agencies. In addition, local donor coordination groups, sometimes related to the GPE, have undertaken donor mapping exercises and supported countries in the development and implementation of education sector plans, including through provision of funding. An interesting example of inter-agency partnership at the field level is the “Promoting civic values and life skills for adolescents through education” developed by ESCWA, UNESCO and UNFPA in Iraq, with the strong involvement of national counterparts. The programme assists in the development of a civic educational curriculum which aims at reducing the risk of ethnic and sectarian violence.

The global EFA coordination and the various partnerships and initiatives have been successful in sustaining political momentum and commitment to the EFA goals as well as influencing the global agenda. Nevertheless, UNESCO’s review of the EFA coordination architecture found that country-level debates on key issues are not adequately reflected in the process of agenda-setting at the global level.

C. The Secretary-General’s Global Initiative on Education

Recognizing that education is the main building block of society, the Secretary-General has made education one of the priorities of his Action Plan for the next five years and has decided to launch a new Global Initiative on Education. The objectives are to put education at the heart of the social, political and development agendas and to mobilize additional support for the achievement of the internationally-agreed development goals in education.

This initiative is also based on the recognition of the central role of education in making individuals more resilient to sudden changes due to global crises. Education is indeed the backbone of recovery. Education budgets must therefore be protected, even in the current era of austerity measures. Attempting to make savings in education budgets harms economies for years to come. In the last ten years, advances made in increasing enrolments and reducing gender disparities at the primary level were the direct result of strong political leadership and commitment, combined with sound policies and sufficient financing.

As the critical 2015 juncture approaches, the Initiative is expected to give a stronger impetus to the global movement for education so that the existing momentum turns into concrete commitment and action in order to 1) raise the political profile of education and rally together a broad spectrum of actors; 2) spur a global movement to achieve quality, relevant and inclusive education for all by 2015, with concomitant gains for the broad development agenda, including the MDGs, and 3) generate additional and sufficient funding through sustained advocacy efforts.

The Executive Office of the Secretary-General has set a Steering Committee that includes the EFA convening agencies and UN-Women to work on the focus, targets and strategy of the Initiative. The three priority areas of the Initiative are: 1) Put every child in school; 2) Improve the quality of education; and 3) Foster global citizenship. The Secretary-General will launch the Initiative in the margins of the 67th session of the General Assembly.

III. Enhancing partnerships between the United Nations and other stakeholders

While governments are responsible and accountable for the provision of quality basic education, it is widely recognized that non-State actors also have an important role to play. Their contributions can take different forms, from service providers to innovators, advocates and policy partners, among others. Partnerships between the UN and other stakeholders have increased during the past decade. The level of engagement of civil society and the private sector in policy dialogue can be seen as one of the successes of the global EFA coordination.

UN entities have strengthened the representation of key stakeholders in policy debates and activities by different means. For example, in addition to the more thematically-focused partnerships and initiatives mentioned in Section II of this report, UNESCO has established formal mechanisms for collaboration with NGOs (the Consultative Consultation with NGOs, CCNGO/EFA), the private sector (Partnership for Education, PfE) and the Network of Parliamentarians for EFA. In addition, the E9 Initiative is a mechanism for South-South cooperation of the nine most populous developing countries.

A. Overview of partnerships with different categories of actors **Regional and sub-regional organizations in the field of education**

Strong partnerships have been established with a wide range of regional and sub-regional intergovernmental organisations from all continents, which play a central role in monitoring progress on EFA, MDG-related and other regional education goals and in promoting accountability. Structures have also been put in place at the level of the Regional Economic Commissions to promote education, and partnerships with Regional Development Banks have helped strengthened outreach and capacity.

Examples of regional partnerships include UN-Habitat's cooperation with the South East Asia Ministers of Education Office (SEAMEO), the African Institute of Sathya Sai Education (TAISSE) and international NGOs to implement water education-related projects at country level. As for the Regional Commissions, the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development serves as the regional implementation pillar of the strategy and promotes multi-stakeholder partnerships in the region.

Partnerships through South-South cooperation have recently increased. For example, a partnership with the Government of Brazil and WFP has led to the creation of the WFP Centre of Excellence against hunger which works with Governments from Latin America to strengthen national capacity for school feeding and other programmes. An innovative partnership of UN-Women with the Barefoot College of India has helped train 25 African women, mainly illiterate grandmothers, from Liberia, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda as “solar engineers” in the installation and maintenance of solar panels and its systems to electrify their own homes and villages. The Barefoot College has also become the first civil society partner to join UNESCO’s Global Partnership for Girls’ and Women’s Education in 2012.

Civil society

The United Nations system is increasingly engaging with civil society organizations to promote the development agenda. For example, the coordination mechanism for partnerships with the civil society established by UNESCO, the CCNGO/EFA, has increased in membership and scope, and now includes close to 300 national, regional and international member organisations. UNFPA and UNICEF have expanded their partnerships to include faith-based organizations and have developed specific tools to implement activities with such organizations on the ground.

UNAIDS is the first UN Programme to have civil society formally represented in its governing body - the Programme Coordinating Board (PCB). The UNAIDS PCB NGO delegations have been instrumental in incorporating the perspectives of civil society, including people living with HIV, within UNAIDS policies and programming. In the field of education, they played a key role in supporting efforts to strengthen the incorporation of comprehensive sexuality education policies and programs into its Strategy 2011-2015.

When partnering with UN entities, civil society organizations usually play several roles including policy-dialogue, advocacy and mobilization, monitoring, providing alternative services and developing innovative approaches, thereby strengthening their capacities. However, at national level, the involvement of NGOs in meaningful policy dialogue is very varied, as reluctance to fully include them in decision-making still exists.

UN institutions also develop partnerships with civil society organizations through grants to help implement specific projects. For example, UN-Women supports secondary and vocational education for women and girls in Africa and Asia through the Fund for Gender Equality.

Parliamentarians

Parliamentarians play a vital role by legislating education laws, approving a national budget that provides funds for education, monitoring government spending and work and representing citizens and voters by voicing their constituents’ concerns. Support from parliamentarians helps to enhance EFA as a top priority in the national

agenda, promote education as a human right, implement educational strategies and legislations, mobilize financial resources for education and monitor progress in meeting the EFA and MDG-related goals.

Four parliamentarian forums for education have been established, with UNESCO's support, in Africa (FAPED), the Arab States (FARPED), Latin America and the Caribbean (FRACPED). The first session of the General Assembly of the Asia Pacific Forum (FASPPED) took place in Jakarta, Indonesia on 6-7 July 2010. During the Assembly, the delegates adopted an action plan to implement inclusive educational policies and mobilize financial and human resources to EFA in the next biennium.

Private sector

The private sector is not a new actor in the field of education. Although its role and functions continue to generate divisive discussions within the education community, there is a growing momentum to deepen and enhance its engagement in recent years, notably through public-private and multi-stakeholder partnerships. The number of partnerships for education between the UN and companies, business organizations or corporate foundations has multiplied during the past decade.

Technology companies have been particularly active within the EFA movement. For example, UNESCO is partnering with Nokia, Microsoft, Intel and Cisco to promote the use of new technologies for teacher training, literacy, skills development, and distance learning, and with companies specialized in other industries, like Procter and Gamble to increase women's and girls' literacy and GEMS Education to improve teacher training. The private sector is called upon to provide assistance in measuring learning achievement through innovative technology. For example, UNESCO and UNICEF partner with the Brookings Institutions and Hewlett Foundation to develop new learning metrics that can inform quality goals. Under the umbrella of Education for Sustainable Development, partnerships with the private sector flourish, such as multimedia teaching on sustainability.

In addition to bilateral partnerships on specific projects with individual companies or foundations, the UN system endeavors to develop broader innovative partnership platforms with different constituencies. In May 2011, UNESCO set up a Global Partnership for Girls and Women's Education to galvanize support from various partners to girls' enrolments in secondary education and women's literacy. This partnership brought in a number of private sector partners. UNIDO has also partnered with public and private entities to establish training and coaching programmes on entrepreneurship development for the youth. Such programmes have been implemented in Tunisia and in sub-Saharan Africa with a view to enable the youth to generate their own income, in a context marked by massive youth employment and related social and political instability.

UNESCO and the World Economic Forum have launched a joint initiative entitled "*Partnerships for Education*" (Pfe) to foster, inform and facilitate the development of multi-stakeholder partnerships for education (MSPEs). This coalition of

public and private partners committed to developing new and innovative models of partnerships in the education sector. Through the PfE initiative, UNESCO and the World Economic Forum have identified and disseminated principles and models of successful MSPEs, strengthened the representation and support of private partners in the EFA movement, and built capacities for partnership development. The core outputs include (1) the publication of a review on partnership models in education¹; (2) a manual to support the monitoring and evaluation of partnerships in the education sector², (3) the creation of a web portal to increase the sharing of information and successful practices on MSPEs³; (4) capacity development activities in Rwanda. Based on the experience of the past five years, the PfE initiative is currently in a phase of transition towards a global alliance of corporate partners for education, under the leadership of UNESCO.

B. Analyses of existing partnerships and ways to improve them

The expansion of partnerships in the education sector brings together new opportunities and challenges for the UN. Through increased dialogue and cooperation with other stakeholders, the UN has leveraged innovation, funding, competencies, capacities and broader public support for education. Partnerships facilitate multidimensional engagement, including by nutrition and health actors, in support of the broader educational goals and therefore contribute to achieving greater results.

At the same time, the UN has to skillfully manage potential risks of partnerships, notably in terms of integrity, reputation, transaction costs and diluted focus on measurable impact. When partnering with these stakeholders, UN agencies need a clear strategy and methodology, strong partnering skills, a very good knowledge of the partners' legitimacy and activities in education, as well as a robust analysis of the local context and educational settings. The following analyses are based on the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on partnerships (A/66/320):

- How to assess, identify and replicate successful partnership models in education?

By increasing experience- and knowledge-sharing of successful (or unsuccessful) partnerships, for example through the United Nations-business website (business.un.org) and the Partnerships for Education online platform (www.pfore.org), UN staff and partners can identify effective partnership practices and their success criteria. However, experience shows a lack of systematic collection of evidence on the impact of partnerships for education. The development and utilization of *Monitoring and Evaluation* frameworks are therefore critical; not only to track the performance and assess the outcomes of specific partnership programmes, but also to inform the development of other projects and initiatives. Impact evaluations should focus on the

¹ A. Draxler, *New Partnerships for EFA: Building on Experience*, UNESCO-IIEP, World Economic Forum, 2008

² N. Marriott, H. Goyder, *Manual for Monitoring and Evaluating Education Partnerships*, UNESCO-IIEP, 2009

³ www.unesco.org/pfore/

educational change the partnership programme has achieved. In addition, the evaluation process should possibly assess the cost effectiveness of the partnership (though cost-benefit analysis), as well as the institutional change achieved within partner organizations.

UNICEF's experience indicates that strong partnerships are critical for enhancing access to quality education for the most marginalized. In addition to traditional partnerships with donor countries, progress has been facilitated through partnerships at country and regional level, across UN agencies as well as through multilateral partnerships. For example, UNICEF's partnership with the Commonwealth of Learning has facilitated the integration of the Child Friendly School (CFS) approach into curricula of teacher training institutions in 8 countries.

It is also important to analyze how partnerships have leveraged the synergies between the different MDGs. This will help highlight the critical role that collaborative efforts to advance education can play in the 'final push' for the MDGs. For example, in eastern and southern Africa, UNAIDS is leading an effort to mobilize regional and national actors to improve the provision of education and sexual and reproductive health services for young people, thereby fostering cross-MDG synergies.

- How to improve partner selection and engagement processes?

Before engaging in a partnership programme for education, it is essential to undertake a comprehensive needs assessment and a mapping in order to identify the challenges to address, the actions required and the potential partners. The education sector is characterized by a wide range of non-State actors and stakeholders. The multiplication of NGOs, teacher unions, parents' associations, philanthropists, corporate foundations, and consulting firms can make the process of engaging partners somewhat complicated. The mapping is an important exercise to involve the relevant actors and programmes related to the core of the partnership, to avoid duplication and overlap with ongoing activities, and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of potential partners, as well as the opportunities and possible risks in partnering. The partner selection process should notably look into the following aspects: ethical chart; official registration; legal cases; experience, scope, scale and impact of previous activities in education; nature and degree of relationship with the government and other educational stakeholders; etc.

- What are the implications for the organizations of the UN system, including capacity building and training of UN staff?

Engagement with outside partners can provide additional funding for education projects and programmes. They also bring in new perspectives and deepen the knowledge base, for example through bringing in innovation and utilizing new technology.

UN staff must be well prepared and equipped with the necessary partnering tools and skills to develop and manage a partnership programme. Organizations should have a clear partnership strategy with non-State actors, provide training and build capacities of staff on partnerships, and create an enabling environment for improved coordination and

cooperation between education specialists, partnership officers and legal affairs departments.

- How can the UN system strengthen an enabling environment for partnerships?

Drawing upon its expertise and convening power, the UN can act as a facilitator and honest broker to enhance collaboration and partnerships between different parties. This can be particularly effective in building trust and confidence between Governments and civil society actors. In addition, utilizing ICTs and social media increases flexibility and allows for a growing sense of accountability towards reaching results.

IV. The UN development agenda and education: perspectives for the future

When considering emerging trends in education worldwide and perspectives for the future, our vision of the international educational agenda should acknowledge the diversity of development situations worldwide and the specific challenges they pose for education, including the situation in middle-income and upper-income countries who may have achieved education-related MDG goals but who continue to face important education challenges.

In this context, it is important to mention the tension regarding the international education agenda set for 2015. The MDG framework, adopted one month after the adoption of the EFA Dakar Framework for Action, somehow challenged EFA as the sole reference for educational development at the global level, and contributed to narrow the international education agenda to universal primary education and gender equality. It is important to keep in mind a broad vision of EFA that encompasses early childhood care and education, youth and adult literacy, vocational skills development, as well as concern for the improvement of the quality and relevance of basic learning. It encompasses lifelong learning in formal, non-formal and informal settings. These aspects need to be captured in the post 2015 development agenda.

1. Overview of the achievement of educational development goals

The world has witnessed steady progress towards achieving the education development goals (MDG 2 and 3 and EFA goals), in particular towards universal education and gender parity at the primary level. Progress in education has been substantial, reflecting not only improvements in the expansion of educational opportunities but also in the equity of access to education for girls and boys. From 1999 to 2008, an additional 52 million children enrolled in primary school, and a 31 per cent increase was noted in pre-primary education enrolment benefiting 148 million children. Additionally, the number of out-of-school children was halved in South and West Asia.

In sub-Saharan Africa, despite a large increase in the primary school-age population, enrolment ratios rose by one-third.⁴

To a large extent the considerable progress demonstrates greater government investments. Low income countries have collectively increased the share of national income spent on education from 2.9 per cent to 3.8 per cent since 1999. Since the adoption of the 2011 Ministerial Declaration, there have been important steps forward and major commitments to global education development. The recent pledging by the GPE to increase bilateral education aid and improve effectiveness of education access and quality between 2011 and 2014 demonstrates the recognition of the need to focus efforts beyond access to quality learning outcomes.

Despite unprecedented commitments, partnerships and progress in improving school enrolment and in promoting gender equality; progress is uneven between and within regions and countries and often too slow to meet the 2015 deadline. Progress towards the goals has not been sufficient and fast enough to meet the target dates, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia. The focus on accelerating progress comes at a time of particular international momentum and opportunity amidst the impact of lingering financial crises and increasing conflict and fragility. Globally, of all the MDGs, those focused on education are the closest to being met, prompting some leaders to focus urgent attention elsewhere.⁵ There is, however, a growing realization that, without renewed commitment and concerted action, countries may very well fall short of reaching MDG 2, 3 and EFA Goals.

2. Trends in international education development

Through monitoring of progress towards the EFA goals and the education-related MDGs, lessons have been drawn that can help define future perspectives, in particular:

- Inequalities: Despite rapid progress made in expanding access to formal basic education worldwide, significant inequalities between countries persist, and national averages in many countries mask striking inequalities in levels of educational attainment and outcomes. Factors contributing to marginalization in education such as gender and geographic location continue to interact with poverty, language, minority status, HIV and AIDS, age (particularly in the case of young adolescent girls), and disability, to create “mutually reinforcing disadvantages”, particularly so in low-income and conflict-affected countries.
- Conflict affected countries: The need to fulfill the right to education is greatest in humanitarian crises, particularly in conflict-affected poor countries where 28 million children are out of school (about 42% of the world total). Gross enrolment ratios in secondary school are nearly 30 per cent lower in conflict-affected countries and are far lower for girls. Yet education receives just 2% of the total humanitarian aid. Increasingly worrisome are the trends indicating that many of

⁴ UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011: the hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education*. UNESCO, Paris, 2011.

⁵ World Bank (2011). *Global Monitoring Report: Improving the Odds of Achieving the MDGs*, Washington, DC.

the world's poorest countries and communities will face the double threat of climate change and violent conflict. Although studies have shown that increased levels of quality learning in primary and secondary education in a country reduce conflict, many governments have not prioritized education.⁶

- Reaching the unreached: With the growing recognition of the challenges of “reaching the unreached”, there is a need to improve the collection and analysis of data disaggregated by sex, age, disability and location (such as household survey data) in order to better identify patterns and causes of school drop-out, in order to design more targeted strategies for the most marginalized children, youth and adults.
- Quality: The expansion in access to basic formal education has shifted the focus from quantitative aspects of education, such as access and participation in formal education to qualitative aspects, such as education quality and learning achievement, with a more equitable social distribution of these. It has also resulted in a growing demand for secondary, technical and higher education, putting the spotlight on issues of retention and transition between different levels of education and raising challenges of policy prioritization and resource distribution across the sector.
- Education for the workforce: the financial crisis has made youth unemployment and skills development pressing challenges for many developed and developing countries. The number of unemployed young people totaled 75 million in 2010. While daunting, this youth bulge is also a window of opportunity as such a substantial youth population can make a significant contribution to the long-run economic growth and performance of a country. This requires long-term investment in quality education and training, providing alternative education opportunities and enhancing learning competencies that are responsive to global changing markets, expanding the work around secondary education, with particular attention to adolescent girls, and recasting its content to better meet the demands of the workforce and other levels of education. It also requires broad-based partnerships among governments, employer organizations, trade unions and other stakeholders to promote decent work for young women and men.
- Financing: There is a growing awareness of the pressures being placed on public financing of education and increasing interest in more efficient use of these limited resources. With increasing number of poor people living in newly emerging middle-income countries, there is a need for greater accountability in the investment of public resources for education, and ways in which to supplement them through greater fiscal capacity and new partnerships with non-state actors. Advocacy for increased official development assistance also remains crucial, in particular to improve progress in girls' education, and access to education in rural areas as well as in fragile States.

The dynamics of international cooperation have significantly changed in the past decade with a multiplication and diversification of development partners. This poses opportunities for increased development assistance to education, but also challenges in terms of coordination and alignment with national priorities which need to be addressed on a continuing basis.

⁶ Save the Children, *Where Peace Begins*, Save the Children Alliance, London, 2008.

3. Reviewing the international education agenda

As we approach the 2015 target date, global processes are being initiated to review experience thus far and to begin defining the possible shape of future education agenda(s). There are several strands of discussion within the current context of review of the MDG experience 2000-2015 and thinking about the *format* and *content* of the future development agenda, and the ways in which these are inter-related.

In terms of process, some of the discussion has to do with the added value of setting targets at the international level on the grounds that such 'one-size fits all' global targets may be considered to be of greater or lesser relevance to countries depending on their specific development challenges. In the area of education, meaningful targets for an overall goal aimed at "improving all aspects of the **quality of education** and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills" (EFA Goal 6) can only be realistically set at the national level. This is grounded in the assumption that each country has its own evolving conceptualization of the quality of education in terms of the performance of the system and the relevance of learning in their specific development context. It is this conceptualization that would constitute the basis of national target-setting and subsequent selection of indicators to monitor progress in the realization of the overall global goal. At the same time, there is a need to ensure that the bar is not set too low and that national goals for quality meet certain standards.

Another lesson learned from the experience of global-target setting within the MDG and EFA experience, is that this encourages reporting of aggregate national data thereby masking the extent of inequality and disparity within countries. Given the concern with **equity** and increasing focus on reducing widening inequality worldwide - national target-setting would allow for the reporting of data disaggregated by not only sex and location, but also other factors that can contribute to marginalization such as age, ethnicity and disability. Efforts are also needed to challenge and minimize the portrayal of stereotyped roles of women and men that can restrain educational choices at all levels of education.

Indeed, the need to monitor national progress on educational goals through more disaggregated data relates to a second dimension of the discussion on the MDG experience which has to do with the focus on outcome indicators. With a combined **concern for equity and quality of education**, interest has gradually shifted to a focus on the results of the educational processes in terms of learning outcomes, as well as their social distribution. Seeing the international education agenda as unfinished business, a focus on learning, on what is actually learned (knowledge and skills), rather than on mere participation in educational processes, is also based on the recognition of the limits of traditional proxy indicators - such as pupil/teacher ratios, share of qualified teachers, and mean years of schooling - in gauging the quality and contribution of education to inclusive development.

The recent emphasis on learning and the corollary interest in large-scale assessments of learning outcomes may overlook the fact that current large-scale evaluations only measure a limited range of cognitive skills. In addition, learning assessments should necessarily be grounded in local contexts and needs, if they are to be relevant for national educational processes. Furthermore, standardized assessments of learning and impact assessments are important business industries, with the associated risk of perpetuating the dependence of the most aid-dependent countries on the North for the design of these tools.

It might be helpful, for instance, to focus more on process indicators at the country level, which may be better suited to report on: (1) national efforts made to monitor levels of learning, as well as their social distribution at various stages of education, and (2) the use of such data in informing strategic interventions to improve the general levels of learning and ensure their more equitable distribution. Such process indicators would allow national education authorities to be held more accountable for the results of public investment in education. This would also help to capture the performance trajectory of countries. One of the drawbacks with the MDGs and the EFA goals is that they focused primarily on a country's success in meeting target levels and did not adequately take into account the pace of progress. Consideration of the rate of improvement is important, in particular for countries making rapid headway but from a very low base level.

In addition, the current context of the global economic crisis and massive youth unemployment necessitates building strategic alliances to improve the supply of relevant education opportunities for youth and the demand for a skilled labor work force. Strengthened collaboration between the ILO, UNESCO, UNIDO and the World Bank is needed for a greater articulation between technical and vocational training and education, higher education, and the world of work. In addition to improving employment opportunities for youth in the formal sector, there is a need for training and coaching programmes aimed at assisting youth to identify business opportunities with growth potential in their communities, access to finance for starts-up and expansion of their businesses.

Examples of successful vocational training include a UN WTO Quality assurance in Tourism Education (TedQual) Programme for Africa, which was developed in partnership with six education institutions in order to facilitate education cooperation activities between Africa and Europe. UN WTO also supported a programme called Tourism Friendly Schools which seeks to contribute to a better quality of education by assuring a closer interaction between the students and their territory and by providing them with specific training to become community leaders where tourism is considered a positive tool to reduce poverty.

4. Beyond the international education agenda: Emerging trends for the future of education

The exponential growth of information and its changing nature

With the continued development of knowledge societies, the rate of production and the volume of information continue to grow exponentially. Information is less and less dependent on text-based transmission and increasingly includes audio, graphic, and visual supports. According to WTO, the past decade has witnessed a rapid expansion of international trade in education services, demonstrated by the increasing international mobility of students, which is estimated to have grown by over 80 per cent from 1999 to 2007. The number of students on on-line learning and other types of offshore programmes has also been growing steadily.

The exponential growth in the volume of information and its changing nature are questioning the very notions of the authority of traditional bodies of knowledge controlled by legitimate educational institutions and an elite corps of specialists.

From a focus on teaching to increasing attention being paid to learning

With formal education traditionally emphasising teaching more than learning, education systems have focused on the transfer of information and knowledge from the teacher to the learner. Such a teacher-dependent education system is also time-dependent, location-dependent, and situation-dependent. With the multiplication of new information and communication technologies and digital media, sources of information and knowledge are becoming more diversified and accessible beyond the confines of formal education systems. Beyond the traditional curriculum-related questions of what to teach (learning content) and how to teach it (teaching/learning methods), the question is increasingly becoming *when* and *where* to teach and learn. Recognizing that learning is increasingly happening individually beyond formal educational settings, at different times and locations, the role of teachers will have to evolve from dispensers of information and knowledge to facilitators and enablers of learning.

The UN system has started to adapt its activities to respond to this major shift. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the emerging *Partnership on Learning*, which involves UN agencies (UNICEF, UNESCO), Private Foundations (e.g. Hewlett Foundation), Development Partners, Think Tanks and Academic Institutions (Brookings), INGOS to develop learning metrics that can inform the post-MDG quality goals, if there is a global agreement on having such goals.

A specific reference also deserves to be made to the Education Reform Strategy which was launched on 5 October 2011 by UNWRA, at the occasion of World Teacher's Day. The reform aims to improve the effectiveness and relevance of the UNWRA education programme, which concerns half a million Palestine refugee children in some 700 schools. Based on a comprehensive external review, the heart of the reform is

classroom practice and changing the dynamics of the learning process towards addressing the needs of all children and students.

Beyond functional literacy

While progress continues to be made in reducing illiteracy worldwide and narrowing gender gaps, particularly among youth - essentially as a result of the expansion of access to formal education systems - there are still an estimated 760 million illiterate youth and adults.⁷ Not only does illiteracy continue to represent a persistent challenge, but notions of what constitutes a minimum threshold of functional literacy are changing as a result of progress in science and technology. It is therefore important to consider the various forms of information and media literacy required for full integration into the contemporary knowledge society⁸. Not only are the skills associated with the use of new digital media becoming more complex, but the vocabulary created to comprehend them is being enriched on an almost daily basis. Some have therefore argued that “the distance between the functionally literate and the super literate is growing.” Beyond minimalistic definitions of literacy and numeracy skills, educational development must address the issue of adequate literacy, information and media literacy required for the digital age.

Lifelong learning: Beyond classroom-centred paradigm of education

While a great deal of learning covered by formal education may take place at home, at school and elsewhere in the form of homework, reading and preparation for examinations, the physical space defined by the classroom remains a central feature of formal education systems at all levels of learning. Although the lifelong learning paradigm is not new⁹, recent developments in terms of the continuously quickening pace of technological and scientific development, an increasingly volatile job market, the exponential growth and changing nature of education, the gradual erosion of the monopoly of authority by traditional sources of knowledge, such as teachers, professors, specialists, the increasingly challenging task of forecasting the emergence of new professions and associated skills needs, are all reinvigorating the relevance of life-long education.

From a focus on the content of learning to the assessment and validation of learning

The growing recognition of the importance of learning and relearning taking place outside the formal education and training systems raises the issue of the assessment and validation of learning acquired through self-learning, peer-learning, or on the job. From a traditional focus on the content of learning programmes and teaching/learning methods, the focus is now shifting to the assessment and validation of knowledge and skills, regardless of the pathways through which they were acquired.

⁷ UNESCO (2011). *EFA Global Monitoring Report*.

⁸ UNESCO (2008) *Information and Media Literacy*.

⁹ See for example UNESCO (1972). *Learning to Be*.

V. Conclusion and recommendations

This report testifies to the positive momentum within the United Nations system to promote the UN development agenda as it relates to education and the Education for All goals. It also illustrates that much more needs to be done in order to realize the right of everyone, including the poor, to education, while assisting countries in making the transition towards improved quality of education and greater focus on learning. These efforts cannot be made by Governments and UN actors alone. Partnerships within the UN system as well as with other stakeholders are essential to maximize capacities and to multiply the transformation power of each. Only through a coordinated and at times integrated approach can the immense challenges ahead be significantly taken up. The Secretary-General's Global Initiative on Education can create a new momentum to that end.

When reviewing the role of the UN system in implementing the international development goals and commitments with regard to education, the Council may wish to take into account the following recommendations:

- (a) The United Nations system should be encouraged and given the means to raise the profile of the international education agenda and maximize educational results;
- (b) The United Nations system should support the efforts of the Secretary-General, including through the Global Initiative on Education, to spur a global movement to achieve quality, relevant and inclusive education for all by 2015, including the MDGs and EFA Goals, with concomitant gains for the broad development agenda;
- (c) Particular attention should be given to addressing factors of marginalization in education, such as gender, age, location and disability, with a special focus to be placed on reaching women and girls in rural areas;
- (d) Concerted efforts are needed to improve the collection and analysis of education data disaggregated by sex, age, disability, location and other relevant factors for effective policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- (e) More attention should be placed by the UN system on supporting countries to minimize the portrayal of stereotyped roles of women and men that can restrain educational choices at all levels of education;
- (f) Synergies should be sought between UN entities working in the food, health and education sectors in order to enhance enrolment, retention, participation and achievement of girls and boys and maximize interventions to the benefit of children;
- (g) More should be done by all actors, particularly the UN system present on the ground, to ensure the realization of the right to education in humanitarian crises, particularly in conflict-affected poor countries and to make sure that it becomes an integral part of any early and longer term recovery strategy;

- (h) The issues of youth unemployment and skills development in the context of the financial crisis should find appropriate resonance in the work of the system and be supported adequately; collaboration among UN entities working in the economic and educational fields should be strengthened in order to facilitate greater articulation between technical and vocational training, higher education and the world of work and to promote entrepreneurship among the youth;**
- (i) The UN system should be increasingly recognized as both a framework provider and a facilitator for partnerships with a wide range of actors, in particular non governmental organizations and the private sector, with a view to building trust among different actors;**
- (j) The UN system should strengthen the enabling environment for partnerships, improve partner selection and engagement processes, place greater emphasis on impact, transparency, coherence, accountability and sustainability, and develop capacity of UN staff to that end;**
- (k) The UN system should share good practices and lessons learned in partnerships on education to identify and replicate successful partnership models, maximize efficiencies and synergies, and create conditions for effective scaling up;**
- (l) The Council itself should continue to act as a platform for discussing partnerships and their role in implementing the UN development agenda in all its dimensions, particularly at the Council's coordination segment; such discussions should give strategic guidance in developing partnerships for key priority areas;**
- (m) When determining future policy options, it is important to have a broad vision that encompasses early childhood care and education, youth and adult literacy, vocational skills development as well as concern for the improvement of the quality and relevance of basic learning;**
- (n) Relevant UN entities should be encouraged to assess emerging trends in education, particularly the increased focus on learning and the use of ICTs in education processes, and to analyze their implications for the form and content of educational policies at the national and global level;**
- (o) Appropriate consideration should be given to the above dimensions in the processes devoted to the definition of the post 2015 UN development agenda.**