

The G8 / G20 and Education for All

Issue

The Canadian Global Campaign for Education, a coalition of 21 NGOs, universities and research institutes and the Canadian Teachers' Federation, believes that support for universal quality basic education is essential both for poverty reduction and long-term sustainable and democratic development around the world. Despite repeated international commitments, 72 million children do not have access to primary education, and one in five adults cannot read or write. In addition, lack of early childhood care and development services is contributing to a global learning crisis in the early grades, with high rates of drop-out, repetition and underachievement.

Summary / Key Messages

1. The international education goals are achievable! Through a combination of sound policy-making and increased domestic and external resources over the past nine years, around 40 million more primary-age children have gone to school, and the gender gap is slowly closing. Let's lock in these gains and build upon them.
2. The international compact around the Education for All goals needs to be revitalized. Despite the gains that have been made, there remains a funding crisis for the EFA agenda. Without further assistance, progress will not be quick enough to ensure the 2015 EFA and MDG education related targets. Aid to education must be increased through innovative financing mechanisms that ensure predictable, sustained support for country-driven plans in line with the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda. In addition, aid needs to be better coordinated and implemented, particularly for least-developed countries and conflict-affected states.
3. Canada is well-positioned to be a leader on the education issue. The Government's new Children and Youth Strategy demonstrates our continued commitment to basic education as a tool for poverty reduction and sustainable growth. Since 2000, the percentage of Canadian aid disbursed to basic education has increased substantially, and we remain among the top donors to the sector. The Huntsville G8/20 meetings are an opportunity for Canada to build on the leadership demonstrated at Kananaskis, the result of which was the establishment of the Education for All Fast Track Initiative, and the doubling of Canadian aid to Africa (with a large share to basic education). Canada should build on its commitment to accountability for results in the achievement of Education for All by sponsoring a coordinated platform for action among G8 and G20 countries.

Background: Why Education for All Matters

It is the world's poorest who are missing out on an education today. And it is the world's poorest who stand the most to gain if they only had the chance to learn.

Education is imperative to tackling poverty

- No country has ever achieved continuous and rapid economic growth without first having at least 40% of its adults able to read and write.

- A single year of primary school increases the wages people earn later in life by 5-15% for boys and even more for girls.

Education is essential to improving child survival and maternal health

- A child born to a literate mother is 50% more likely to survive past the age of 5 years.
- Educated mothers are 50% more likely to immunize their children.
- Women with six or more years of education are more likely to seek prenatal care, assisted childbirth, and postnatal care, reducing the risk of maternal and child mortality and illness.
- Gains in women's education made the most significant difference in reducing malnutrition, outperforming a simple increase in the availability of food.

Education is fundamental to empowering women and girls

- On average, for a girl in a poor country, each additional year of education beyond grades three or four will lead to 20% higher wages and a 10% decrease in the risk of her own children dying of preventable causes.
- Then chief economist of the World Bank, Lawrence Summers, asserts that "educating girls yields a higher rate of return than any other investment available in the developing world."

Recommendations

The Canadian Global Campaign for Education urges the Canadian government to seize the leadership opportunity created by hosting the G8/20 nations in 2010 by mandating the establishment of a high-level task force to plan for the rejuvenation of international Education for All efforts. The task force would be required to report back to the G20 in South Korea. The task force must address, in particular:

1. The urgent need for innovative and sustainable forms of financing to lock in recent EFA gains and ensure that these are extended to all children by 2015.
2. The creation of a larger partnership within the G20 towards the fulfillment of the Education for All and education related Millennium Development Goals.
3. Reform of the international aid architecture for education to better address the following issues:
 - The need for greater donor coordination and stronger partnership between governments and civil society at the country level.
 - A focus on accountability for results, especially in the form of positive learning outcomes for all children.
 - Ensuring that no country is left behind: in particular, those affected by conflict and those that receive small shares of current aid to the sector.