

April 2010 action:

Girls, guns and goals: campaigning for education for all in 2010

RESULTS
the power to end poverty

TAKE ACTION:

This month we will be speaking out in our communities about the UK's role in reaching education for all around the world. Do one or both of the following:

- Write a letter to the editor or opinion piece for your local newspaper or other media outlet, calling on the candidates in the upcoming election to support UK investment in education for all globally. Remember to refer to your local MP – or MPs if the paper covers more than one constituency – by name so that they will be sure to read the piece.
- If you have contact with a local school or know a teacher at a local school, encourage them to sign up to IGOAL and hold a IGOAL event in the school during the World Cup this summer. To sign up they will need to get in contact with 'Send my Friend to School', a campaign run by the Global Campaign for Education – see background sheet 2 for more details. They can sign up online at <http://www.sendmyfriend.org/one-goal/order-schools-pack> or speak to Nicola Cadbury, nicola.cadbury@actionaid.org or 020 7561 7679

Introduction

Education is the key to empowerment for individuals and one of the most effective development interventions possible. It contributes to greater economic growth, healthier populations and a more stable society. Equal access to education for all reduces inequality and poverty.

The international community is firmly committed to the principle of 'education for all' through the Education for All Goals and the two Millennium Development Goals that relate to education: reaching universal primary education by 2015 and eliminating gender disparity in education at all levels by 2015.

Great progress has been made since 2000 and there are now 47 million more children attending primary school. The number of out of school primary aged children dropped from 104 million in 1999 to 72 million in 2007 (the latest available figures). However since 2004 progress has stalled. On current trends there will still be 54 million children out of school in 2015, the year in which we are supposed to achieve universal primary education.

Who is being left behind?

As progress towards getting all children into and achieving at school is slowing, it is becoming ever clearer that there is a cohort of children who are being left behind. These are children who are marginalised for a number of different reasons – commonly because they are girls (54% of out-of-school children), children living with disabilities (approximately 33% of out-of-school children) or HIV/AIDS, children living in conflict-affected fragile states (around half of out-of-school children), or ethnic and linguistic minorities – and often they will combine several of these characteristics.

Many of these children will never enrol in school; others will enrol but will drop out early before they can even attain basic levels of literacy and numeracy, or attend so infrequently that it is hard for them to learn. In fact, if you include drop-outs and students with unacceptably low levels of attendance and achievement estimates are that 300 million children are excluded from accessing a quality basic education.

The financial crisis

2010 is set to be a critically important year for education around the world. With only 5 years left to reach the Millennium Development Goals of universal primary education and gender equality at all levels of education, the world must act now to ensure that the last 72 million out-of-school children get into the education system and that the 300 million who are struggling to learn and in danger of dropping out of school can realise their right to learn at school.

The financial crisis that began in 2008 is already causing poor families to withdraw their children from school so that they can work to replace lost earnings – and despite the fact that educating girls is the best development investment a country can make, girls are almost always the first to be taken out of school in these situations. Meanwhile government budgets face dramatic cuts over the next few years – Sub-Saharan Africa faces a potential loss of around US\$4.6 billion annually in financing for education in 2009 and 2010, equivalent to a 10% reduction in spending per primary-school pupil.¹

To stop this threat becoming a disaster for development the international community must act now, delivering the increased funding needed to reach the last 72 million

¹ Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010

out of school children and protect the advances of the last decade.

The role of aid to education

Aid to education has an important role to play in enabling developing countries to sustain the increase needed in the provision of education even as domestic education budgets are coming under greater pressure due to the repercussions of the financial crisis. The 2010 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) on education for all – which is the official monitor of how much progress the world has made towards getting all children into school – estimates the annual financing gap in aid for education to be US\$16.2 billion. This is the amount of money that is needed on top of domestic spending by governments to ensure that every child can complete a full basic education, and this money has to come from international donors or other external sources. Currently international donors give approximately US\$2.7 billion a year, so an increase of US\$13.5 billion every year is needed.

What is the UK doing?

The UK government is actually very strong on aid to education. In 2006 the then Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown pledged to spend £8.5 billion on aid to education over the ten years to 2015. More recently the Department for International Development (DFID) confirmed that this means they will increase their funding to £1 billion every year by the end of 2010.

The team behind the GMR recently reported that the UK is the only G8 donor that is even close to paying its 'fair share' in aid to education. The UK government's role as a leader on aid to education is important, as it makes them able to challenge other G8 donors such as the USA, Germany, Italy and France to step up to the plate and increase their own contributions to tackle the massive financing gap. The UK government is providing funding for an international campaign – initiated and run by the Global Campaign for Education, of which RESULTS is a member – to encourage governments in the developing and developed world to commit more funding to ensure we can get all children completing basic education. This campaign is called IGOAL, and is using the massive outreach potential of the World Cup, which is being held in Africa for the first time this year, to get the message out. More information on this campaign is on background sheet 2.

The UK general election

The UK government must hold a general election by the beginning of June this year – currently the best estimate is that the election will be held in early May, though this is not yet confirmed. We are in a time of massive political change in the UK at the moment, and there is a high likelihood that the government will change at this election. Even if the government does not change, huge numbers of MPs are resigning (called 'standing down', which means they are not putting themselves forward to compete the election) and we will therefore have large numbers of new Members of Parliament in place around the middle of this year.

While all three major political parties have pledged to increase the UK's overall aid levels to 0.7% of GDP by 2013, as yet there are no specific pledges on aid to education from either opposition party – the Conservatives or the Liberal Democrats. This raises the possibility that a new UK government could commit less of the aid budget to education in coming years, which would be a tragedy for individual children across the developing world as well as for their countries. It is therefore now a crucial time to talk to those who are standing for election about the importance of education for fighting poverty, and call on them to throw their support behind strong UK support for education internationally.

Take action

MPs and MP candidates care deeply about what is being said in their constituencies. In the run-up to the election this will be more true than ever. And this means that they read their local newspapers. This month we have a two-part action. The first is to get a letter to the editor or an opinion editorial published in your local newspaper.

The second part of the action is looking ahead to what we are going to do later in the year, when we will be joining with the IGOAL campaign to celebrate education during the World Cup. The Global Campaign for Education's UK Coalition is aiming to sign up 8,000 schools to hold IGOAL events during the election, which will educate teachers, children and parents about the issue of education financing and generate lots of noise about the issue to keep our politicians on the ball! What we are asking you to do now is to contact any local schools that you have a link with and encourage them to sign up to host a IGOAL event in June or July. There will be lots more opportunities to engage further with these events throughout the next few months.