

A plea to the new Prime Minister: don't drop the ball on education for all!

TAKE ACTION:

This month we will be writing directly to David Cameron, our new Prime Minister, to highlight the 1GOAL campaign and the importance of education for poverty reduction around the world. We will ask him to:

- Commit to strong UK funding for aid to education, reaffirming or exceeding the previous government's pledge of spending £1 billion each year on basic education up to 2015;
- Use upcoming international events to: 1) strongly push other countries to announce further funding for education to meet their 'fair shares' of the financing gap at the international summits later in the year, and 2) take the lead internationally on creating an action plan to reach Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3, including reform of the international aid architecture on education.

If a letter to the editor on the importance of aid to education was published in your community for the April RESULTS action, include a copy with your letter to draw attention to the public concern about this issue.

Introduction

Seventy-two million primary aged children across the globe are not in school. This is more than the number of all primary school children in Europe, the USA, Canada, and Australia combined. While the overall number of children denied a basic education has decreased since 2000, progress has stagnated and current trends suggest that 56 million children will still be out of school by 2015.

Poverty prevents many children from receiving an education, such as [Raheem in India](#) who had to drop out of school at age six to work in a clothes shop. Other groups of children who are particularly vulnerable to being excluded from education include children living with disabilities or HIV/AIDS and children living in conflict-affected states. [Eduardo](#), a 12-year-old boy who lives in Angola, explains how war prevented him from attending school for most of his life: 'For two years we were always running and trying to escape from soldiers chasing us. One time we hid in the river to escape. We didn't have any food, shelter, blankets, tents – nothing.'

A new beginning in the UK

This isn't news to RESULTS activists, but we are now in a new situation, with a new government, and it's important that we go back to basics and make the argument again that education is fundamental to poverty reduction. The World Bank, which is the most prominent development institution in the world, heads its education webpage with the words: 'Education is universally recognized as one of the most fundamental building blocks for human

development and poverty reduction. It is key to attaining the Millennium Development Goals.' Lack of education is one of the root causes of poverty, while investing in education contributes to economic growth, yields higher wages, produces healthier populations, and reduces the chances of being infected with HIV/AIDS. See Background Sheet 2 for more evidence of the effectiveness of education for poverty reduction.

Recent intelligence on the new government's views on education suggests that as yet it is not seen as a top priority in development aid – the new Ministers are currently most enthusiastic about supporting health and in particular the fight against Malaria. These are certainly not bad priorities, but it's crucial that we get through to them with the message that education too is something that the UK must continue to strongly support. More details on what the new government has said publicly on education are in Background Sheet 1, but the headline message is that although both parties in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition have spoken about the importance of education, no specific commitments on the level of support – financially and in terms of high-level policy priorities – have yet been forthcoming.

Why is it so important for the UK to strongly support global education?

As education is such a powerful development intervention, it should be obvious that the UK government needs to support it in order to reach their stated priorities of helping the poorest people in the world and reaching the Millennium Development

Goals. However, it's additionally important to recognise the crucial role that the UK has historically played in the education aid arena.

In 2006, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown pledged to spend £8.5 billion on aid to education by 2015 and the Department for International Development has been steadily increasing its allocation to aid to education since then. Under the previous government it was due to hit £1 billion annually by this year. This represents more or less exactly the UK's 'fair share' of the external financing gap for providing universal access to basic education, which UNESCO estimates as being \$16.2 billion every year.

The UK's strong performance on aid to education has made our country a world leader on this issue – for example Brown's announcement helped to elicit major funding commitments from the other G8 nations. However, other countries have not met these commitments and are letting down the whole international community (see Background Sheet 1 for more details). That the UK has kept to its promises and dramatically scaled up aid to education is a real achievement, which should be celebrated and sustained under the new government, not least in order that we can put further pressure on other countries to do their bit.

While the UK's record on aid to education is very good, there are areas in which past performance could be improved by the new government – for example there was insufficient focus on how to help children with disabilities, who make up approximately one third of all out of school children, get into and achieve at school. For more details see our recent report [DFID, disability and education: bridging the implementation gap](#).

International opportunities

During the coming summer and autumn several major international events are due to be held that relate to education for all, and offer the potential to reinvigorate international efforts to enable everyone to receive an education. The first of these is the 1GOAL campaign, which is an international campaign run by the Global Campaign for Education (and supported by FIFA, the football governing body) aiming to make the legacy of the first World Cup to be

held in Africa education for all the continent's children.

It will be crucial that the UK government responds strongly to the 1GOAL campaign, and that they also use this opportunity to push partner countries – both developed and developing – to make further commitments to education and to live up to those that have already been made.

In September, the UN is holding a review summit for the Millennium Development Goals, which will assess the progress that has been made since the goals were agreed in 2000 and decide on global plans to achieve the goals in the remaining 5 years until the 2015 deadline, which applies to the majority of the MDGs. As all RESULTS activists will know, two of the MDGs relate to education: goal number 2, which is universal primary education, and goal number 3, which includes the target of reaching gender equity in education – i.e. as many girls completing education as boys.

Progress towards many of the MDGs is behind schedule, including those on education. However, while there has been discussion of 'action plans' in some specific areas such as gender equality, focusing particularly on the maternal health goal, there is as of yet no international plan to achieve the education MDGs.

In addition, the international aid architecture for education is currently weak. The Education for All Fast Track Initiative is the best multilateral financing mechanism (a mechanism that receives donations from many countries or sources and coordinates the spending of these) we have for education, but it has not been able to attract anything like the level of funding that is needed to achieve the education MDGs. (See our [February 2010 action sheet](#) for more details.) International efforts to reform the Initiative, making it more effective and better funded, are essential and should be a major feature of negotiations in the lead-up to the MDG summit.