

# FULFILLING THE **PROMISE**

Ensuring the post-2015  
education agenda delivers  
on equity and learning



**Save the Children**

# GETTING ALL CHILDREN INTO SCHOOL AND LEARNING BY 2030

The World Education Forum (WEF) in May 2015 and the UN negotiations towards finalising a post-2015 Sustainable Development Framework provide a critical opportunity for shaping the education agenda for the next 15 years.

Failure to address key education priorities in the past decade has left 58 million children out of school<sup>1</sup> – half of them living in conflict-affected areas – and 250 million children not learning the basics.<sup>2</sup> The poorest and most marginalised children are more likely to be hit by this learning crisis. Without an **ambitious post-2015 education framework that strongly prioritises equity and learning**, we will miss this window of opportunity to ensure that every single child has the chance to thrive and reach their full potential in life.

## ONE UNIFIED POST-2015 EDUCATION AGENDA

It is imperative that we have one unified post-2015 education agenda. The post-2015 framework negotiations at the UN must be aligned with and inextricably linked to the recommendations from the Education For All (EFA) process, working towards a congruent goal, and set of targets and indicators.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND LEARNING

Numeracy and literacy are critical skills, which enable children to continue their education. If they don't learn these core skills, children are more likely to drop out of school and fail to make progress. But education targets must also go beyond these core skills, recognising that **learning outcomes must be relevant to children's characteristics and situations**.<sup>3</sup> The indicators for post-2015 education targets should include measures of the quality of education, such as those used in Save the Children's Quality Learning Environment (QLE) Framework.<sup>4</sup>

Learning should also be considered as a continuum: **good quality early childhood development opportunities** and **good quality post-primary education** contribute to reducing poverty for children and their families.

## EQUITY – LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

For the post-2015 education framework to realise its transformative potential, it must pursue an equitable approach to achieving goals and targets, putting the needs of the most marginalised first. It needs to include specific mechanisms for incentivising action on equity, in particular:

- **The commitment that “no target be considered met unless met for all”** – included in the UN Secretary General's Post-2015 Synthesis Report – must now be embedded firmly in the final post-2015 agreement.
- Language on ‘**narrowing the gaps**’ between the most advantaged and disadvantaged children should be inserted into the post-2015 education indicators.
- Global and national **interim stepping stone targets** should be established – building on Kevin Watkins' approach.<sup>5</sup> These targets would ensure that sufficient progress is made for the most disadvantaged children in the next 15 years and are key to ensuring equity is at the core of the post-2015 education framework.

## EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

Given that children affected by conflict and emergencies are one of the most excluded groups from education, it is of critical importance that **we prioritise and promote crisis-sensitive approaches and greater action on education in emergencies** in the post-2015 framework. This should include greater prioritisation of and finance for education in emergencies, building resilience in education systems, and protecting children and schools from attack and violence.

## BOX 1: SAVE THE CHILDREN'S FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE: EDUCATION GOAL

**PRIMARY EDUCATION:** Ensure all girls and boys achieve relevant, measurable learning outcomes by the end of primary education, with gaps in learning between advantaged and disadvantaged groups significantly reduced.

### Success indicators for 2030:

- All boys and girls complete primary school.
- The gap in learning outcomes between the poorest and richest children has reduced by at least x%.\*
- All children can read with understanding by the end of their third year in primary school.
- All children with disabilities achieve their learning potential by the end of primary school.

**Stepping stone target:** By 2022, x%\* of children in the most disadvantaged groups (including those with disabilities) achieve minimum relevant learning outcomes, and disparity between more and less advantaged groups has narrowed.

**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, CARE AND DEVELOPMENT:** Ensure all children start school ready to learn, with gaps in child development between advantaged and disadvantaged groups reduced.

### Success indicators for 2030:

- All girls and boys access early childhood development services.
- All children achieve appropriate levels of child development, and the gap between the poorest and richest children has reduced by at least x%.\*
- All children under five experience responsive, stimulating parenting in safe environments.

**Stepping stone target:** By 2022, x%\* of children in disadvantaged groups have appropriate levels of child development, and disparity between more and less advantaged groups has narrowed.

**LITERACY, NUMERACY AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS:** Ensure all young people have functional literacy, numeracy, technical and life skills to become active citizens with decent employment.

### Success indicators for 2030:

- 50% increase in secondary school completion rates for girls and boys in the most disadvantaged socio-economic groups.
- Gender parity in secondary school completion rates globally and nationally.
- All young people have functional literacy and numeracy skills, relevant life skills and access to educational opportunities.
- All young people are in education, training or employment.

**Stepping stone target:** By 2022, x%\* of children in disadvantaged groups transition from primary to secondary school, and disparity between more and less advantaged groups has narrowed.

**ACCESS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, INCLUDING IN EMERGENCIES:** Ensure all children have access to good-quality, safe, and inclusive basic education, including in emergencies.

### Success indicators for 2030:

- Primary education is free and compulsory for all, delivered through inclusive systems and without violence.
- All teachers are professionally trained, with regional disparities in numbers of trained teachers eliminated.
- Maximum x%\* of teacher absenteeism rates nationally.
- Domestic finance: 4–6% of GDP, or at least 15–20% of public expenditure, allocated to education, with spending targeted towards the most disadvantaged children.
- Strategies are implemented in all countries to ensure safe facilities and educational continuity in disasters.

**Stepping stone target:** By 2022, x%\* of children in disadvantaged groups are taught by a professionally trained teacher, and disparity between more and less advantaged groups has narrowed.

\* x-values to be defined at the national level

For further detail, see Save the Children (2014) *Framework for the Future*

# AN IMPLEMENTABLE AGENDA

To be implementable, the post-2015 education framework needs to be supported by clear and measurable indicators, robust accountability mechanisms, and political support and financing.

## CLEAR AND MEASURABLE INDICATORS

**Indicators should incentivise action on equity and learning.** They need to track progress across all relevant social and economic groups – going beyond sex, wealth and location to also include disability and a measure for education in emergencies, such as ‘displaced children’. Indicators should also include measures to ‘narrow the gaps’ between the most advantaged and disadvantaged groups. A **data revolution** is needed to enable policy-makers, teachers, care-givers and community leaders to better collect, disaggregate and analyse these data.

In order to maximise its political traction and uptake, the framework needs to clearly prioritise a limited number of indicators for global tracking, while retaining support for more nuanced national reporting through **a complementary dashboard of additional national indicators**.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

The ‘Education 2030’ **Framework for Action** must be a clear and compelling document which inspires political action that will translate the post-2015 education goal and targets into practice. **Systems of governance and accountability** should be included in the framework to better monitor delivery of education services at global, national and local levels, with a strong role for civil society actors.

Learners and teachers should be able to participate meaningfully in decision-making at all levels, as well as in education sector planning and budget setting and monitoring.<sup>6</sup>

## POLITICAL SUPPORT AND FINANCING

As primary duty-bearers, governments have a responsibility to provide sufficient funding for equitable, inclusive, good-quality education and lifelong learning for all. This should include raising finance through **fair and progressive taxation**, and ensuring effective spending through **robust public financial management systems**.

Targeted action, including **targeted funding**, will be required to reach the poorest children, children with disabilities, girls, children from minority ethnic communities, and children who live in conflict- or emergency-affected countries.

It is estimated that the annual total cost of achieving universal pre-primary, primary and lower-secondary education in low and lower-middle income countries will increase from US\$100 billion in 2012 to US\$239 billion, on average, between 2015 and 2030.<sup>7</sup> Even if those countries increase the proportion of GDP which they allocate to education to an average of 5.4%, there will still be **an annual US\$22 billion per year financing gap**.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, increased aid to education is also required.<sup>9</sup>

In emergency-affected countries, the inability to fund education has stalled progress in getting children in school and learning in crisis situations.<sup>10</sup>

**Clear and ambitious financing targets** will be needed to ensure the implementation and monitoring of an ambitious post-2015 education framework. Save the Children calls for increased aid to education, and supports the Muscat Agreement target for domestic financing of 4–6% of GDP, or at least 15–20% of public expenditure, prioritising groups most in need.<sup>11</sup>

There is an urgent need to **galvanise new international resources**, better coordination, greater locking together of knowledge, innovation and results – and scaling-up the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), with its country-led and partnership-based model is the best way to do this.



# STEPPING STONE TARGETS TO ENSURE EQUITABLE PROGRESS

## LESSONS FROM UNEQUAL PROGRESS SINCE 2000

While there has been progress in getting all children in school since 2000, the world has failed to meet the EFA goals.<sup>12</sup> Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and EFA Dakar Framework has failed to prevent the most marginalised children from being left behind. We cannot make the same mistakes in the post-2015 framework.

The poorest children are four times more likely to be out of school and five times more likely not to complete primary education than the richest.<sup>13</sup> Monitoring progress through national average rates has hidden wider inequalities among groups – in particular, those with multiple forms of disadvantage. For example, as Figure I shows, average rates of reduction in the number of children never to have attended school mask the fact that the poorest girls are still most likely to miss out.



Children in class at a Save the Children supported school, Estancia, Iloilo, Philippines.



## EQUITY STEPPING STONES TARGETS

Without targeted action to address the needs of the most marginalised, we simply will not achieve the post-2015 education goal and targets by 2030. Stepping stones targets are an effective mechanism to ensure that no one is left behind. Their objectives are to maintain fast average progress at the national level, to ensure that disadvantaged groups are on track to achieve 2030 targets, and to reduce gaps in human development outcomes that stem from systematic differences in life chances between groups of children.<sup>14</sup>

### GLOBAL TARGETS

At the global level, the Open Working Group (OWG) for SDG Outcome Document, includes a separate target on equity within the education goal – see Box 2. To ensure this target is met in 2030, an interim stepping stone target should be set to reduce gaps between disadvantaged and advantaged groups.

### NATIONAL TARGETS

When preparing national education sector plans, governments should define stepping stone targets for disadvantaged groups that are at risk of being

## BOX 2: SDG GOAL 4

### Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

**Target 4.5:** By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including people with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations.

left behind. The groups should be identified through open, inclusive and participatory processes linked to post-2015 monitoring and accountability systems at the national and international levels. Particular attention should be given to the context, taking into account historical trends and reasons why some groups are left behind. In many low-income countries, the aim of the stepping stone targets would be to considerably accelerate recent rates of progress.<sup>15</sup>



Children at an early childhood care and development centre in Burera, Rwanda supported by Save the Children.

Despite recent improvement in access to pre-primary education in Laos, maintaining average progress since 2006 would enable children in urban areas to reach the early childhood education target by 2030, but not those in rural areas – see Box 3. To ensure all children in rural areas in Laos have access to early childhood education, the rate of progress between 2011 and 2030 would need to be almost double the rate of progress achieved between

2006 and 2011. Adopting a stepping stone target for early childhood education would mean that for rural areas, the proportion of children aged three to five attending some sort of pre-primary education programme would need to reach 64% by 2022. This would ensure that by 2030, children in rural areas are on track to achieve the early childhood education target by 2030 and would reduce the gap between urban and rural areas.

### BOX 3: ILLUSTRATING THE STEPPING STONE CONCEPT FOR EDUCATION

In developing countries, living in a rural area can be a barrier to access to pre-primary education programmes.

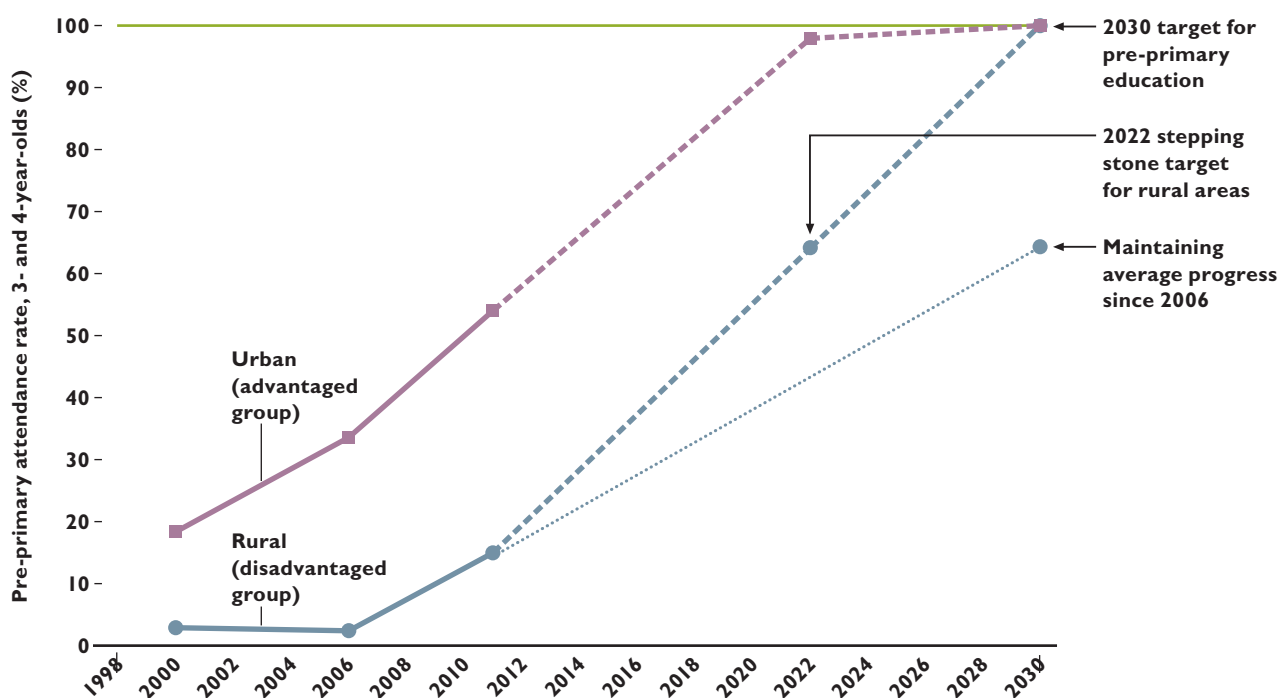
While Laos is very far from reaching the current EFA early childhood education target,<sup>16</sup> access to early learning services has expanded since 2006, with the average rate growing from 7.4% to 23% in 2011.

However, the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged groups has widened. Between 2000 and 2011, the early learning gap between rural and urban children has grown from 15.5 to

39 points – with only 15% of rural children attending pre-primary education programmes. Recent rates of progress since 2006 are positive, and by 2030 urban children should all be able to access early learning services. But if trends remain the same, 36% of rural children would still miss out on pre-primary education programmes.

For Laos to reach the proposed post-2015 pre-primary education target by 2030, there needs to be a more rapid rate of progress for children in rural areas, and a stepping stone target of 64% of pre-primary education enrolment for rural children could be set for the mid-point date of 2022.

FIGURE 2: TRENDS IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION ATTENDANCE IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS IN LAOS



Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) reports.



# CONCLUSIONS

## SAVE THE CHILDREN'S POST-2015 EDUCATION CALL TO ACTION

To respond to the learning crisis and reduce educational inequality, the post-2015 framework must be **ambitious, equitable, and implementable**, galvanising the international community to take focused and coordinated action to get all children in school and learning, across all contexts.

Specifically, we call on the international community and governments to ensure that:

- SDG and EFA post-2015 frameworks are complementary and synergised to represent **one unified agenda**.
- The post-2015 education framework **incentivises action on equity and learning**, with:
  - a commitment that ‘no target be considered met unless met for all’
  - clear and measurable indicators that track progress in narrowing the gaps between most advantaged and disadvantaged groups
  - establishment of global and national-level interim **stepping stone targets**.
- The post-2015 agenda promotes **greater action on education in emergencies**.
- The post-2015 education agenda is backed up with **sufficient finance and political commitment, together with clear and robust accountability structures, to ensure that the targets are actually achieved by 2030**.

## REFERENCES AND NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> UNESCO 2014. EFA Global Monitoring Report, *Teaching and Learning: Achieving quality for all*. [http://unesco.nl/sites/default/files/dossier/gmr\\_2013-4.pdf](http://unesco.nl/sites/default/files/dossier/gmr_2013-4.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> United Nations. 2001. Convention on the Rights of the Child; Annex IX General Comment No.1, Article 29 (1): The Aims of Education.

<sup>4</sup> Save the Children *15 Measuring results in education*. [www.open.edu/openlearnworks/pluginfile.php/74613/mod\\_resource/content/3/15%20Measuring%20education.pdf?forcedownload=1](http://www.open.edu/openlearnworks/pluginfile.php/74613/mod_resource/content/3/15%20Measuring%20education.pdf?forcedownload=1)

<sup>5</sup> Watkins, K., 2014. Leaving no one behind. An agenda for equity. *Lancet* (May).

<sup>6</sup> Save the Children 2013, *The Right to Learn: Community participation in improving learning*.

<sup>7</sup> EFA GMR Policy Paper, March 2015. *Pricing the right to education: The cost of reaching new targets by 2030*. <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/232197E.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Save the Children 2014 Norway. *More is not enough*.

<sup>10</sup> Save the Children UK, 2011. *Make it happen: Financing Education in countries affected by conflict and emergencies*.

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO 2014. GEM Final Statement: *The Muscat Agreement*. <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/muscat-agreement-2014.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO 2015. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015. *Education For All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges*. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002322/232205e.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid: p.i.

<sup>14</sup> Save the Children, 2014. *Leaving No One Behind*.

<sup>15</sup> Rose, P., Three lessons for educational quality in post-2015 goals and targets: Clarity, measurability and equity. *International Journal of Educational Development*. (2014).

<sup>16</sup> As no target has been set for an early childhood care and development goal in the EFA framework, the Global Monitoring Report has set an indicative pre-primary enrolment target of 80%.

**Save the Children works in more than 120 countries. We save children's lives. We fight for their rights. We help them achieve their potential.**

Save the Children  
1 St John's Lane  
London EC1M 4AR  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7012 6400  
Fax: +44 (0)20 7012 6963

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