



Education For All (EFA) Global Action Week 19-25 April 2004

One in three children out of school

More than one in three of the world's children – 36 per cent – are not getting a basic education. About two-thirds of these children are girls. Almost all of the out-of-school children live in developing countries, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa and in South and West Asia. These are the poorest regions and the most heavily indebted countries. In the least developed countries, 40 per cent of children who enrol in primary school drop out before achieving basic literacy and numeracy, and only 25 per cent of boys and 14 per cent of girls go on to secondary school.

The Education For All (EFA) initiative, led by a coalition of national and international partners, which the ILO strongly supports, points out that of 155 developing countries, 66 countries have achieved, or are on track to achieve, the EFA's goal of universal primary education by 2015. However, the other 89 are unlikely to reach this goal over the next decade. At current rates of progress 100 million children will still not be enrolled in primary school by 2015. Living in chronic poverty – most often in the poorest developing countries – they are the victims of many human rights violations and accumulating disadvantages, including the significant impact on these societies of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As the ILO knows only too well, the majority of these children are part of another appalling statistic, that of the 246 million child labourers worldwide. In its recent report "A fair globalization: Creating opportunities for all", the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization emphasizes that "Action to increase schooling and skills needs to go hand in hand with action to reduce child labour"

In the context of the Third Meeting of the High-Level Group on EFA in New Delhi, India, November 2003, the ILO, with UNESCO, the World Bank and the Global March Against Child Labour, co-hosted a Round Table entitled "From Exploitation to Education: Achieving Education For All and the Elimination of Child Labour" which led to the New Delhi Declaration. This document underscored "the importance of addressing the root causes of child labour and the poor quality and access to education within a broader poverty reduction strategy in line with the Millennium Development Goals." In this respect, it called for the creation of a global task force on child labour and education.

Girls' work as a major obstacle to girls' education

At least 14 million more girls than boys are left out of school every year. Gender disparities in primary enrolment are overwhelmingly to the disadvantage of girls in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States and South and West Asia. Their work, for example, household chores, domestic servitude, agricultural work and home-based work, is largely hidden and unvalued. Often, when faced with limited resources and many financial demands, parents prefer to invest in the education of their sons and not lose their daughters' vital contribution to the household economy.

Girls' work remains a serious impediment to achieving gender parity in primary and secondary education in 2005 and gender equality in education by 2015. It is therefore evident that more effort

needs to be concentrated on addressing the special concerns and issues of girls in terms of education and child labour. As an active member of the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) led by UNICEF, ILO-IPEC has consistently emphasized the need to ensure that efforts to increase girls' education must go hand in hand with efforts to progressively eliminate child labour.

Child labour and Education for All

Since the majority of these children out of primary education are working children, efforts to achieve universal primary education must be accompanied by other efforts to eliminate child labour. Many factors conspire to keep children out of school. The barriers can be economic, social, cultural and political. In the worst situations, they all act together, erecting a wall that not only deprives children of an education, but a whole society of a better future.

In addition, education systems act as barriers to schooling when they fail to make school an enjoyable and stimulating experience for all pupils. More specifically, education systems exclude children when they fail to provide adequate school buildings and sufficient teachers; schools with basic necessities, such as water and separate toilets; desks and books; educational content that is interesting and relevant; proper training and support for teachers; and an environment that is friendly and secure.

The shortage of teachers is growing

One of the biggest barriers is the lack of teachers, especially qualified teachers. Up to an estimated 35 million new primary teachers will need to be trained and recruited to ensure all children have a teacher by 2015. In the meantime, countries struggle merely to keep pace with existing demand. Stagnant salary and working conditions discourage young people from choosing to become teachers in the poorest countries.

Many more do not stay in teaching past their fifth year, choosing the best non-teaching job they can find in the prime of their careers to earn a living wage, escape the difficulties of isolated teaching with no support in poor areas, or shed the stress of unruly students. On top of these difficulties, HIV/AIDS is taking a significant toll on young teachers in sub-Saharan Africa, and beginning to do the same in Asia and the Caribbean. Policies are urgently needed to professionally train and develop people to teach, to pay them a comparable salary which respects the critical function of teaching, and to involve them directly in decisions on education that create a quality, child-centred learning environment and encourage teachers to stay in the profession.

Global collective responsibility

The ILO is promoting EFA in the context of its Decent Work objectives, not only as a means to combat child labour, but also as part of its work to develop vocational and skills training, to promote the status of teachers and to uphold their individual rights and the rights of their organizations.

A key feature of the ILO's work now and for the next two years will be an action programme to help its constituents identify solutions for addressing teacher shortages. The ILO is also working with UNESCO, Education International (EI) and the World Confederation of Teachers (WCT) in an innovative EFA Flagship programme on teachers and the quality of education.

These programmes provide an opportunity to bring certain ILO strengths to bear on EFA and child labour-related issues: a tripartite partnership of governments, employers and workers, including teachers' organizations, and a long history of social dialogue to solve social problems. Indeed,

history has shown how instrumental education has been in the elimination of child labour, establishing a skilled workforce and promoting development based on principals of social justice.

Education For All is everybody's business and everyone has a role to play. Just being aware that over 100 million children have no access to school is in itself a major step forward. However, it is crucial that awareness is followed by practical steps taken together as partners to get each of those 100 million children into a school, ensure that they remain there and help them to become literate and numerate and thereafter to become trained in skills that will guarantee them decent work.

The ILO urges its constituents to take part in any way possible in the activities being proposed around EFA/Global Action Week 2004 and to encourage the level of behavioural change necessary to help these children in a sustainable manner. Contacts should be made with national teachers' organizations, ministries of labour and education and employers' organizations to find out more about national and local activities and how to support them. Further examples of either how to support already organized initiatives or steps to be taken to launch new ones can be found on the following web sites:

- ILO – www.ilo.org/childlabour
- ILO's Sectoral Activities Programme on Education – www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/sector/sectors/educat.htm
- UNESCO – www.unesco.org/education/efa/index.shtml
- Global Campaign for Education – www.campaignforeducation.org
- Third High Level Group Meeting on Education For All, November 10 – 12 2003, New Delhi, India – www.hlgnewdelhi.com/conference_information.htm