

# EDUCATION MATTERS: EXPLORING EDUCATION'S ROLE IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Alexandra J. Kenyon<sup>a</sup>, Carmen Rodríguez-Santos

<sup>a</sup>University Vitez, Management and Social Sciences, Bosnia and Herzegovina, [alexandrajkenyon@gmail.com](mailto:alexandrajkenyon@gmail.com)

<sup>b</sup>University of León, Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences, Spain

## Abstract

Many intergovernmental forums provide structured, constructive, and cooperative platforms to enable State Leaders to work together effectively on global issues that affect us all. The global issue under investigation in this paper is education because education matters. Education is evolving into a fundamental entitlement that societies owe their members, with a growing recognition of the state's duty to guarantee a fair, high-quality, and inclusive educational experience for every student, regardless of their background or circumstances (Totan and Dawed, 2023). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was formed in 1945 to establish international cooperation in education, science, culture, and communication. It aimed to "... strengthen humankind's intellectual and moral solidarity" (UNESCO n.d., n.p.). To that end, they lead the debate among nations regarding alternative futures for education and learning, always grounded on principles of human rights, social justice, human dignity, and cultural diversity. This paper will demonstrate the significance of education by reflecting on three pivotal international forums that have shaped its trajectory over the past seven decades. These forums, which led to the establishment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), Quality Education, are a testament to the collective efforts of nations. SDG 4, one of the 17 development goals endorsed at the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on the 25th of September 2015, sets indicators and targets for individual countries and their governments to provide quality education and lifelong learning opportunities by 2030. Education, a human and legal right for all, is not just about learning; it is a gateway to individual human development, social justice, and lasting peace. However, with 250 million children still out of school and slow progress in achieving the SDG 4 goal of universal primary education, there is a pressing need for action. We will provide a deeper review of how education improves human development and demonstrate how tertiary education develops healthier, more employable, prosperous, environmentally conscious, and active individuals within their community. Advanced education is a critical dimension that improves individuals' health, prosperity, and societal levels. In this section, we will present data and commentary using the Human Development Index (HDI) that demonstrates how countries are working toward Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and how education contributes to the achievement of other SDGs. This paper will include data from four European Global North countries, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, as well as four countries from the Global South: Algeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Mali. We will demonstrate how the three chosen forums have contributed to improving the human development of citizens in those nations.

**Keywords:** Human Rights, Quality Education, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), Human Development Index (HDI)

**JEL Classification:** O1, I2, F5

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) such as the United Nations (UN), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Group of Twenty (G20), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and are just some of the international inter-agency organisations form to lead, cooperate, and promote global peace and prosperity to proceed towards a Liberal World Order (Council on Foreign Relations n.d.). However, global challenges such as poverty, education inequality, environmental degradation, conflict, and corruption continue (United Nations 2023a). To drive international inter-agency organisations further and deeper, the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development blueprint sets into force goals, targets, and indicators to address global challenges and transform our world. In 2015, 193 Member State leaders signed the United Nations' 2030 Agenda, pledged action, and agreed to achieve 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 Targets (United Nations General Assembly 2015). The pledge aimed to shift the collective consciousness from

the current status quo towards interconnected societies, creating prosperous economies and healthy environments for all citizens.

We believe that education matters. Education is a Human Right. Education benefits individuals and improves the nation's Human Development Index; more importantly, education is the key to ending extreme poverty and humanity's future (Blackburn-Dwyer, 2012). We will reflect on three milestone forums in 1948, 1990, and 2000 that have ensured compulsory and free access to quality education. Further, access to education will be non-discriminatory from primary to tertiary education. The forums we discuss show that the will from governments, policymakers, education specialists, intergovernmental bodies, and non-governmental agencies have future-proofed primary to tertiary education to ensure that the workforce will be healthier and have the knowledge and skills for long-term, prosperous employment in jobs that have not been dreamt of... yet (OECD, 2018).

The forums we have reflected upon helped create Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4): Quality Education, launched in 2015. Contemporary expectations place a new demand on higher education institutions (HEIs) to foster budding entrepreneurial initiatives across diverse academic fields by offering structured entrepreneurship education initiatives. This shift in emphasis is underscored by various scholarly works and policy directives advocating for integrating entrepreneurship education within HEIs' curricula (Aldrich and Yang, 2014; Young, 2014; EC, 2008).

## 2. EDUCATION MATTERS

We think education matters and is transformative, but that has not always been the case. Indeed, between 1820 and 1925, during the First World War and the Great Depression, children were part of the industrialised and agricultural workforce disrupted the progress of education. Education was developing in the Global North countries of France, Germany, Italy, and Spain. However, social divisions favoured education for the elite, and political instabilities and economic constraints were stifling progress. Nevertheless, schooling was on the agenda in each state, and administrations were formed to advance numeracy and literacy through education (Porcher, 2020; Baten, 2022). For the Global South countries we are exploring, it is essential to make known that Algeria and Mali fell under French colonial rule in the 19th Century to their Independence in 1962 for Algeria and 1960 for Mali (Heggoy 1973 Horne 2002; Keohler-Derrick and Lee 2023). Ghana and Kenya fell under British colonial rule, also in the 19th century; these countries gained independence in 1957 for Ghana and for Kenya independence was gained in 1963 (African Collective, 2024). Education for children in Algeria, Ghana, Kenya and Mali was under colonial rule and colonial administration. French Catholic and Protestant missionaries generally provided education for children of the Settlers and indigenous children; though for the indigenous children, education was minimal. Curriculum content and influenced education policy in Algeria and Mali (Bagayoko and Huttinger, 1994; Beck, 2014; Thomas, 1974; Urch, 2017). Likewise, for Ghana and Kenya the Settlers from Britain governed education and its administration along with British and European missionaries (Aboagye 2021, Mackatiani et al., 2016). Colonial Rule in the Global South countries we are exploring meant formal schooling was minimal, and the multiplicity of cultures and languages was far from acknowledged; discrimination was demonstrated, where schooling took place, there was segregation, and curriculums favoured the European settlers. Investment in education was limited and colonial education policy was racially segregated. With that in mind, we will not compare the data between Global North and Global South countries, as it can be observed that the history and opportunities to champion education are not the same. Therefore, our commentary will focus on each country's progress.

No worldwide organisation provided guidelines, leadership, policies, and curriculums until 1925, when the League of Nations, Pierre Bovet, John Dewey, Adolphe Ferrie, Emile Durkheim, and Jean Piaget stated that worldwide education mattered. They formed the International Bureau of Education (IBE) (later known as UNESCO-IBE), which advocated the need for a 'global education charter' to ensure education was accessible to all children. The IBE was the first intergovernmental organisation to not only champion the need to educate all children, but their prime role was to rally governments, ministers, activists, diplomats, and organisations to cooperate internationally, take responsibility for their educational systems and recognise that education champions human development, benefits individuals, households, and nations, as well as creating social justice, well-being, and economic growth (Hofstetter and Schneuwly, 2013; Hofstetter and Schneuwly, 2020). Indeed Butts, the Secretary General of the IBE, stated that "the whole world puts its hope in education" (in Hofstetter and Schneuwly, 2024, p.1); a sentiment we feel is still relevant today.

The IBE's task was to build unity, solidarity, and international intergovernmental cooperation, which was a formidable endeavour, mainly surrounded by North/South and East/West asymmetries, inequality, discrimination, opportunity, culture, and heritage.

To set the scene, in 1820, just 5.2% of boys and 3.1% of girls worldwide were enrolled in primary school; less than 0.1% of boys or girls were enrolled in secondary and tertiary education. Table 1 shows the percentage of children, by gender, enrolled worldwide in primary, secondary, and tertiary education in 1920 and 1945.

The provision and opportunity for children to receive education were sparse globally, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels. However, the IBE worked tirelessly internationally, and the commitment by governments grew. Table 1a data suggests that boys could access education more than girls. Access to education worldwide was restricted for many children because they were working, gender biases, societal hierarchies, colonial structures, war/conflict, and economics. Nevertheless, there was growth in primary education.

Table 2 presents the data set delineated for the European Global North countries, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, and for the Global South, Algeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Mali. Government investment and development of education as a human right are seen as a benefit to individuals and society. The colonizers of Algeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Mali did not invest in education in their early years as settlers, and they relied on missionary schools to educate them. Indeed, the Settlers focused on efficient and effective administrative states for economic exploitation, making economic gains and controlling trading routes rather than expanding the number of schools, training teachers, and providing education for the indigenous peoples of Algeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Mali. However, from 1920 to 1945, countries worldwide recognised that education improved

economic and human development; nationalist movements such as the League of Nations and activists shifted the mindset to the need for education, primary education being the main focus, to build solid nations and improve the economy. Policies for education at home and in the colonies moved forward, and education provision improved (Beck 1966). Table 2 shows data of enrollment in primary education in 1920 and 1945.

As shown in Table 1b, each country increased primary school enrolment, less so for secondary and tertiary education. The data suggests gender bias in Algeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Mali. Nevertheless, education was beginning to matter, and we now take you to the United Nations General Assembly in Paris in 1948, where we will reflect upon our first forum where education became a human right.

**Table 1 | Worldwide Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Education (children enrolled) by Gender between 1820 and 1945**

Worldwide	1920	1945
Boys in primary education	39.3%	58.2%
Girls in primary education	30.5%	43.5%
Boys in secondary education	5.3%	7.9%
Girls in secondary education	2.7%	9.2%
Boys in tertiary education	0.9%	1.7%
Girls in tertiary education	0.2%	1.0%

Source: World Bank (2023) and Lee and Lee (2016).

**Table 2 | Worldwide Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Education (children enrolled) by Gender between 1920 and 1945**

	Global North								Global South							
	France		Germany		Italy		Spain		Algeria		Ghana		Kenya		Mali	
	1920	1945	1920	1945	1920	1945	1920	1945	1920	1945	1920	1945	1920	1945	1920	1945
Boys primary education	100.0	100.0	100.0	87.6	70.5	97.8	44.9	60.5	22.6	27.6	14.4	38.1	7.6	33.1	0.9	4.2
Girls primary education	100.0	100.0	91.4	98.1	87.9	91.6	44.2	58.7	2.6	10.9	2.4	9.3	3.5	14.5	0.1	1.0
Boys secondary education	1.4	11.3	1.5	28.6	3.1	8.2	1.0	3.7	0.2	0.9	<0.1	0.8	0.0	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1
Girls secondary education	7.0	15.2	22.9	35.9	4.7	9.9	1.1	7.9	1.2	1.2	0.1	4.7	<0.01	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1
Boys tertiary education	1.9	4.3	3.1	2.5	1.3	3.1	1.2	1.6	0.3	0.5	<0.1	<0.01	<0.01	0.0	0.0	0.0
Girls tertiary education	1.0	3.2	<0.1	0.4	0.1	1.0	<0.1	0.2	<0.1	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source: World Bank (2023); Lee and Lee (2016) (N.B. This is given as the 'gross' rate, which includes children of any age entering the level of education; this can result in percentages greater than 100 because children may enter education late or repeat a year).

### 3. EDUCATION MATTERS REFLECTION 1: EDUCATION IS A HUMAN RIGHT

The first forum we reflect upon is the United Nations General Assembly in Paris in 1948. At this forum, a monumental document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was presented and provided guidelines to ensure everyone has the right to dignity, freedom of speech, equality, and freedom to be free of fear, all without discrimination (United Nations, 1948)<sup>1</sup>. Over 70 permanent and protected human rights treaties were ratified; one treaty dedicated to education read:

*“Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages (primary). Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available, and higher education shall be equally accessible to all based on merit”* (UNDR, 1948, p. 7).

State leaders ratified the education treaty and pledged that primary education would be *free, compulsory, and non-discriminatory*. It was also proclaimed that secondary (Higher) education should be accessible and progressively free. The notion that education must be a human right had been in the minds of numerous leaders'

consciousness for some time. Indeed, before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDNR) forum, Martin Luther King, Jr. stated that education is crucial, firstly as a utilitarian function and secondly as the vehicle that provides society with a moral compass (King, Jr. 1947). He and others, including Kofi Annan, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize; Eleanor Roosevelt, an American political leader and activist; and Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, Jordanian UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, advocated that education is essential for humanity because it is liberating, gives children, young people, and adults character as well as providing them with the tools to think broadly, intensively, and critically (Peck, 1953; Beauchamp, 1975). Indeed, those sentiments were acknowledged with the decree at the Paris conference that education was a critical vehicle to promote and protect... *all other human rights treaties* (UNICEF, n.d.). The United Nations signified the importance of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights conference. They championed the right to education as the platform to realise and engage with other human rights, as well as education being a means to empower marginalized adults, women, and children so they can participate in their communities, reduce exploitation, improve their

standard of living promote democracy, and protect the environment (United Nations, 1966).

We now move forward to the World Declaration on Education for All 1990 forum for our second reflection to understand if education as a human right became accessible to all and what education's role is in human development.

#### 4. EDUCATION MATTERS REFLECTION 2: EDUCATION IS AN INDISPENSABLE ENABLER

The World Declaration of Education for All 1990 forum was held in Jomtien, Thailand. Unlike the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNHR) forum, which was dedicated to many global challenges, the Jomtien conference we reflected upon was dedicated to education.

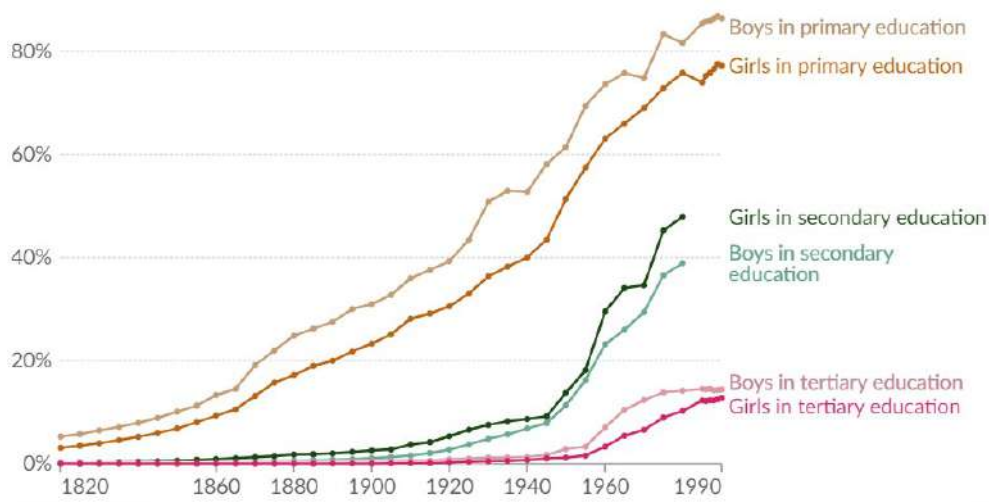
The purpose of this forum was to ensure... *“Every person - child, youth, and adult - shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs”* (Article 1) (UNHR, 1990). However, despite education being a human right, a rule of law ratified 40 years before this conference, the human right to education was not available to all. In 1990 there were more than 100 million children had no access to primary schooling, 60 million of whom were girls, more than 100 million children did not finish basic education, and adult illiteracy remained unacceptably high, with over 960 million illiterate adults, of which 640 million were women (Katiyar in: Baikady et al., 2022; Humanium, 1990).

Further, minorities, vulnerable girls, and groups classified by religion or social origin were *also* excluded from education (Katiyar, in Baikady et al., 2022; Cree et al., 2023). Moreover, we know that any group(s) excluded from learning *cannot* exercise their right to education or begin to develop themselves and the wider society (Moretti, 2016; UNESCO, 2017; UNICEF, n.d.). Likewise, those not completing their education are disadvantaged, too, as they will not be empowered with the essential knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development and support families and the wider community.

Despite the disappointingly high number of children excluded from primary school and not completing their studies. It is essential to present education enrolment data up to 1990 to see the state of play presented at the Jomtien forum. Therefore, consulting data from the World Bank (2023) and Lee and Lee (2016), as shown in Figure 1, shows that worldwide, there has been considerable progress in the number of girls and boys enrolled in primary education. Indeed, a significant uptick occurred following the 1948 Paris conference, where it was pledged that education was a human right and would be free *for everyone*.

However, the percentage of children enrolled in primary education worldwide as of 1990 had not reached 100%; enrolment for boys was 86.5%, and for girls it was 77.2%. At that time, the world focused on primary and secondary education following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDNR); nevertheless, this snapshot provides the primary, secondary, and tertiary education enrolments that would have been available at Jomtien.

Figure 1. | Percentage share of boys and girls enrolled in primary, secondary, and tertiary education – World 1820 to 1990



Source: World Bank (2023); Lee and Lee (2016)

The data shown in Figure 1 suggests that many governments had been investing in education at all levels, not just at the primary level, as we again see an uptick in the 1950s as more children progressed to secondary and tertiary education in the 1960s. Nevertheless, it can be

observed that there is a gender gap between children attending primary and secondary school, less so in tertiary education.

Despite the convergence in the number of children enrolling in primary education, education in certain regions was sporadic and developing regions were lagging. Leading the Jomtien forum, Wadi D. Hadda<sup>ii</sup> forged all states to reinvigorate their commitment to education, and whilst education for all children and young people has challenges, international cooperation and solidarity must prevail. In truth, Hadda again requested pledges to free primary education because it is foundational for building a just and sustainable future, so primary education must be *compulsory*. Further, at Jomtien, attendees agreed that access to *higher education* for all, based on merit, can and must also be achieved. Commitment to education pledges at Jomtien was palpable because the number and composition of attendees had grown to delegations from 155 countries and 40 intergovernmental organisations (UNESCO, 1990).

Two significant outputs from this conference were: firstly, attendees agreed that education mattered; this time, education was attributed to being indispensable and was *the enabler* to bring forth “... a safer, healthier, more prosperous and environmentally sound world, while simultaneously contributing to social, economic, and cultural progress, tolerance, and international cooperation.” (UNESCO, 1990, 2, original emphasis).

Acknowledging that everyone needs to view education as indispensable and as the force enabler in progressing humanity, equality, and peace. Secondly, the following two pledges were also significant outputs:

1. ...to engage wholeheartedly with the World Declaration and Framework for Action. This committed 155 governments to invest in policies to provide quality education for children, youth, and adult literacy and to, of course, monitor and evaluate progress, and...

2. ... to provide quality teaching and learning with an epistemological curriculum that further moves education from general learning to a curriculum that constructs knowledge and values through life skills, vocational training, inclusive learning, traditional/indigenous teachings, and non-formal delivery systems to learn about health, nutrition, the environment, technology, and fertility awareness (UNESCO, 1990; Okello and Ocheng, 1996).

The outputs from the Jomtien conference, built upon the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) forum, ensure the human right to education and learning, critical thinking, and life skills through primary, secondary, and tertiary education and gender parity will improve values and attitudes. The skills and knowledge learnt through primary, secondary, and tertiary education will improve the health and well-being of the nation, which in turn leads to a longer life expectancy and will meet the needs for future workplaces and employment, which were then and still are accelerating and changing at an unprecedented pace (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 1990; Humanium, 1990).

## 5. EDUCATION MATTERS REFLECTION 3: TIME-BOUND TARGETS AND EQUALITY

Our third international conference reflection took us to the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in New York in 2000. The audience grew to 189 UN member states and 149 international leaders with their delegations. All were committed to broader issues, including combating disease, hunger, poverty, education, adult literacy, gender disparity and environmental degradation. Therefore, like The Universal Declaration of Human Rights conference in Paris (1948), the Millennium Summit discussed various global challenges, not just education. This Summit’s *purpose* was to... “*spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty*” (United Nations 2010, n.p.).

Once more, the hosts and attendees elevated education and championed it as the driving force; this time to progress human rights worldwide, help reduce poverty, champion equality, and empower individuals to be sustainable and enjoy healthier lives and well-being (Sarda et al., 2018; OECD, 2021). Whilst we had seen vague targets set and monitoring systems developed at international and education conferences, the Millennium Summit was a *game-changer*.

The *game-changer* was the introduction of 8 Goals, 21 Targets, and 48 time-bound Indicators. Furthermore, all countries worldwide had *only* 15 years to achieve *all* the goals, targets, and indicators. The Millennium Summit motivated urgency and action, galvanising policy and education professionals to allocate resources accordingly. To meet MDG2, governments needed to mobilize, invest in the training of teachers, and build infrastructures to enable all children to enrol and complete primary education by 2015.

We focus on two targets supporting Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3, as shown in Table 3. Worldwide primary education enrolment moved from 83% in 2000 to 91% in 2015, but enrolment is not the only target supporting MDG2. We, therefore, focus on the target of completing an entire course of *primary schooling*. Before we present the data, it must be acknowledged that primary education is fragile for millions of children due to the lack of continuous funding by governments, conflict, and displacement. Indeed, in some areas around the world, children are highly affected by hunger and malnutrition, and others are victims of forced labour. Cultural disparities are high in some countries that exclude girls from school to perform domestic duties. Further, there are fewer opportunities for children to start primary education, never mind completing an entire programme of primary school education, particularly for those living in rural areas, marginalized communities and those displaced and/or are refugees (United Nations, 2000; The Food and Agricultural Organisation, 2000).

We now first reflect upon Millennium Target 2A, where Children everywhere, boys and girls alike, can complete a full course of primary schooling. Table 4 shows the percentage primary completion rates for our chosen countries for 2000 and 2015. Data shows that Germany,

Italy, and Spain achieved a 100% primary completion rate for an entire course of primary school education by 2015. For France, by 2015, the completion rate of a full course of primary education was 99%.

**Table 3 | Millennium Goal 2 (MDG2) and Millennium Goal 3 (MDG3)**

Millennium Goal	Millennium Goal Target	Our Target
Millennium Development Goal 2 (MDG2): <b>Achieve Universal Primary Education</b>	Target 2A. Children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to <b>complete a full course of primary schooling</b>	Completing a full course of primary schooling
Millennium Development Goal 3 (MDG3): <b>Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women</b>	Target 3A. Eliminate Gender Parity in Primary and Secondary Education	Gender Parity in Primary Education Enrollment

Source: UNESCO via Our World in Data (2024) MDG2 and UNESCO via Our World in Data (2024) MDG3.

**Table 4 | MDG Target 2.A Primary Education Indicators: Completion: Global North and Global South<sup>iii</sup>**

Country	Global North							
	France		Germany		Italy		Spain	
Year	2000	2015	2000	2015	2000	2015	2000	2015
Primary Completion %	99.0	99.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	98.0	100.0
Country	Global South							
	Algeria		Ghana		Kenya		Mali	
Year	2000	2015	2000	2015	2000	2015	2000	2015
Primary Completion %	83.0	94.0	58.0	73.0	63.0	72.0	19.0	48.0

Source: Our World in Data: UNESCO via World Bank (2024a).

**Table 5 | MDG3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women: Gender Parity Index Primary Education Enrolment**

Country	Global North											
	France			Germany			Italy			Spain		
Year	2000	2005	2015	2000	2005	2015	2000	2005	2015	2000	2005	2015
Gender parity in net enrolment rates in primary education (GPI)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.01	1.00	0.99	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.01
Country	Global South											
	Algeria			Ghana			Kenya			Mali		
Year	2000	2005	2015	2000	2005	2015	2000	2005	2015	2002	2005	2015
Gender parity in net enrolment rates in primary education (GPI)	0.97	0.98	0.99	0.97	0.99	1.01	1.03	0.99	n.d	0.77	0.79	0.88

Source: UNESCO via Our World in Data (2024b).

For the Global South countries chosen, the Millennium Target 2A of all children completing a full course of primary schooling was not achieved. Table 4 shows that Algeria, Kenya, and Ghana made strides between 2000 and 2015 to enable enrolled primary school children to complete their primary education.

This situation is particularly acute for Mali in 2000, where, of those who enrolled in primary education, just 19% completed a full course of primary schooling in 2000. By 2015, more than 48% of the children enrolled in primary education had completed the full course. Failure to complete an entire course of primary education is similar to that noted above and is often due to the country's economic restraints, lack of infrastructure/investment by governments, poverty, and access to school in rural areas

for marginalised groups and girls facing cultural barriers prevented full completion of primary education.

The second *time-bound MDG we reflect upon is MDG3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women*. The MDG3's goal was to empower women and girls and give them equal rights, with indicators being to participate in the workforce, be a paid worker outside of agriculture, take on public decision-making roles in parliament and have equal opportunity to education. To ascertain if the elimination of gender disparity in education was achieved, we turn to the Gender Parity Index (GPI). A country's Gender Parity Index (GPI) Gender parity is defined as a GPI between 0.97 and 1.03. Values below 0.97 favour males, and above 1.0 favour females (United Nations, 2023). If the GPI is between 0.97 and 1.03 for education, it suggests that relative access to education is equal for both males

and females; thus, gender parity has been achieved. Globally, gender parity in primary education enrolment moved to 1.00 GPI in 2015; this indicator was achieved worldwide; however, at the country level, it was not. Table 5 shows the Gender Parity Index in primary education for our chosen countries, showing the years 2000 (launch of MDG3), 2005 and 2015 (target date for MDG3). The Global North and Global South countries, excluding Mali, achieved the Global Parity Index for Primary Enrolment. Mali did not eliminate gender disparity. Historically, there has been gender inequality in Mali. It remains difficult for girls to access education in general. Additionally, Mali girls often marry by the age of 14, and whether married or living in the family home, girls miss school due to domestic duties at home; those who gain access to primary school often do not complete their education (Kellogg, 2018).

We have reflected on three forums that have galvanised action towards governments investing in and improving opportunities for boys and girls to have and to quality education worldwide. This forum was the first to introduce time-bound targets and clear indicators to demonstrate achievement. The 15-year time-bound targets and indicators created urgency to action. The forum also made a critical target to eliminate gender disparity, requiring action for equality. Agreements by heads of state were made to ensure all countries monitored their data, particularly for enrolment and completion of primary and secondary education and provided data with completion targets.

## 6. EDUCATION MATTERS: EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

In the previous sections of this paper, we have provided reflections on three forums that, amongst other forums, have led to increased progress in education for all. These forums have contributed to the United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development in 2015. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has 17 Goals, and SDG 4 is Quality Education. We are over halfway through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We know that education matters. At the forums we have reflected upon, we have seen agreements to the fact that education is an indispensable enabler to improve the human condition, and we have shown through data the improvement of enrolment and completion of primary education, enrolment to secondary and tertiary education and gender parity for countries in the Global North and Global South countries.

Hosts, speakers, and attendees at the forums, we have reflected upon stated education matters and is essential *because education is the vehicle* to promote and protect 70 human rights treaties and can move our progress forward regarding humanity, equality, and peace, all of which help improve society. Additionally, the forums have advocated that education enables individuals to gain employment, earn a decent living, contribute economically to society, and enjoy a longer, healthier life (OECD, 2021; Johnson and Al-Hamad 2011).

**Table 6 | The Human Development Index (HDI)**

Dimensions	Indicators	Dimension Index
Long and Healthy Life	Life expectancy at birth	Life Expectancy Index
Knowledge through education	Expected years of schooling Mean years of schooling	Education Index
A decent standard of living	Gross National Income (GNI) per capita (PPP \$)	GNI Index

**Table 7 | Human Development Index (HDI) in 1990 Ranked by HDI Value**

Country	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	Gross national income (GNI) per capita \$*	HDI score
<b>Global North</b>					
Germany	81.0	17.3	14.3	55,340	0.950
Spain	83.9	17.8	10.6	40,043	0.911
France	83.2	16.0	11.7	47,379	0.910
Italy	84.1	16.7	10.7	44,284	0.906
<b>Global South</b>					
Algeria	77.1	15.5	7.0	10,978	0.745
Ghana	63.9	11.6	6.4	5,380	0.602
Kenya	62.1	11.4	7.7	4,808	0.601
Mali	59.4	7.0	1.6	2,044	0.410
World	72.0	13.0	8.7	17,254	0.739

Source: United Nations (2024) HDI United Nations (1990).

We have seen that education has positive benefits, and while education may lead to a long life, it may not always lead to a healthier life. Moreover, in some countries, due

to conflict, corruption, lack of investment in the education infrastructure and/or famine, education may not

necessarily lead to employment and prosperity (Sarda et al., 2019; Sagar and Najam, 1998).

However, to understand if education can contribute to health, life expectancy and education developments, we turned to the Human Development Index (HDI) to demonstrate how education helps improve citizens' overall well-being (Table 6). These dimensions and indicators are scored and ranked to measure human development. Education has two Indicators. The score and ranking of the HDI measures a country's average achievements in terms of a long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living (United Nations, 2022; WHO, n.d.; Deb, 2015), enabling countries to develop society.

As stated above, countries are ranked, and Tables 7 and 8 show the HDIs of the Global North, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain and the HDIs of the Global South Algeria, Ghana, Kenya and Mali. Countries are generally conscious of the benefits of education, and those with the means to invest in quality education at primary, secondary, and

tertiary levels can encourage their population to seek further skills through lifelong learning. The Human Development Index is widely used to assess human development and progress in human well-being (Estoque and Murayama, 2014). Governments, and indeed those present at world forums for education and broader global forums such as the Millennium Development Goal conference (2000) take on the role of providing appropriate education within their means, improving health, and advancing the well-being of their citizens (Musyimi, 2023), which lifts their citizens out of poverty (Nainggolan et al., 2022). Extended education is further postulated as the fundamental driver of personal, economic, and social development. This benefits individuals and society by moving us all towards a greater understanding of each other, sustainable practices, and peace. Table 4a shows a snapshot of the HDI Value for the Global North and Global South countries, with data showing a country's Life expectancy at Birth, Expected Years of Schooling, Mean Years of Schooling and Gross National Income (GNI) per capita \$ for the year 1990; Table 8 does the same for the year 2022.

**Table 8 | Human Development Index (HDI) in 2022 Ranked by HDI Value**

Country	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	Gross national income (GNI) per capita \$*	HDI score
<b>Global North</b>					
Germany	81.0	17.3	14.3	55,340	0.950
Spain	83.9	17.8	10.6	40,043	0.911
France	83.2	16.0	11.7	47,379	0.910
Italy	84.1	16.7	10.7	44,284	0.906
<b>Global South</b>					
Algeria	77.1	15.5	7.0	10,978	0.745
Ghana	63.9	11.6	6.4	5,380	0.602
Kenya	62.1	11.4	7.7	4,808	0.601
Mali	59.4	7.0	1.6	2,044	0.410
World	72.0	13.0	8.7	17,254	0.739

Source: United Nations (2024) HDI United Nations (1990).

We can see from the data in Table 7 and 8 that there have been improvements in the Human Development Index for all the Global North and the Global South countries. Citizens of each country have a longer life expectancy at birth; children will expect to have more years of education together with a higher mean year of schooling. The Gross national income (GNI) per capita has also increased; it is worth noting here that the GNI per capita will vastly differ in each country due to many economic and cost of living factors.

We can also see that Mali is still struggling to make significant headway due in part to the recent socio-political crises; further, many women and children have been displaced (UNICEF, n.d.) has also noted that whilst the right to education is an important principle, many citizens are not progressing due to conflict, displacement, the Covid-19 pandemic and limited investment in health and education generally.

## 7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our reflections have spanned over 70 years; our first being the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, attended by 55 nation-states, to discuss the Universal Declaration on Human Rights to enable people the world over to have the right to dignity, freedom of speech, equality, and freedom to be free of fear without discrimination. 70 human rights treaties were presented, and 48 member states voted to ratify the Universal Declaration for Human Rights to ensure everyone has the right to dignity, freedom of speech, equality, and freedom, and to be free of fear, all without discrimination (United Nations, 1948). The outcome of this conference is the ratification of 70 permanent and protected human rights: a monumental period in our history. Enabling education to be a human right is a critical output not just in education being a human right. However, that education was considered a critical partner in promoting and protecting all *other human rights treaties*.



The second forum we reflected upon was The World Declaration of Education for All 1990, attended by delegations from 155 countries. Curriculum content was discussed, and there was agreement that life skills, vocational training, inclusive learning, traditional/indigenous teachings, health, and nutrition would be part of formal and non-formal delivery systems to learn about health and nutrition. It was also recorded at this forum that education was recognised as *the conduit to boost human development* and that a broader curriculum would provide knowledge and understanding to build cultural tolerance and peace. Again, it was stated that education improves human development and contributes to making society safer, healthier and more prosperous.

Our third reflection was the Millennium Summit of the United Nations held in 2000 was attended by 189 UN member states. This forum reflected upon the progress of education worldwide. It was claimed that education developments were not moving fast enough to satisfy the knowledge and skills required for future challenges and employment. This forum added urgency to action for all

countries as time-bound targets for education completion and eliminating gender disparities in education. Progress in the Global North and Global South has been seen. However, conflict, lack of investment and cultural differences can hold back progress in Mali and other countries experiencing similar issues.

These reflections demonstrate the value of education for society and the greater good of peace and understanding, and these forums have helped in the development of the Sustainable Development Goal 2030 Agenda, which will continue to build on the successes and experiences of the forums we have reflected upon. The Sustainable Development Goal action plan has 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets, building on the Millennium Development Goals and being particularly cognizant of the MDGs that were not achieved. The SDGs also champion education, ensure education is a human right, and ensure education is for everyone without discrimination. Education matters, and there is still much to do.

## REFERENCES

1. Aboagye, P.Y. (2021) Inequality of education in colonial Ghana: European influences and African responses. *Economic History of Developing Regions*, 36(3), pp. 367-391.
2. Adhiambo, J. N., Getui, M. N. and Wachira, N. (2016) Chapter 9: Contribution of Women Missionaries in Education in Kenya. In: Ginio, R. and Sessions, J. eds. *French colonial rule*. In *Oxford Bibliographies*. Oxford University Press.
3. African Collective (2024) The Independence of Ghana. [Online] Available at: <https://africancollective.org/the-ghana-independence-1957-a-beacon-of-hope-for-africa/> [Accessed 19 January 2024].
4. Aldrich, H.E. and Yang, T. (2013) How do entrepreneurs know what to do? learning and organizing in new ventures. *Journal of Evolutionary Economics*, 24(1), pp. 59–82.
5. Bagayoko, M., and Huttinger, J. (1994) Education policy formation in Mali as a response to political crisis. *Education Policy Formation in Africa: A Comparative Study of Five Countries*, (12), pp. 183-195.
6. Baten, J. (2022) Schooling, literacy and numeracy in 19th century Europe: long-term development and hurdles to efficient schooling. [Online] Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383171> [Accessed 23 February 2024].
7. Beauchamp, G. (1975) *Curriculum theory* (3rd ed.). Wilmette, IL: Kagg Press.
8. Beck, A. (1966) Colonial policy and education in British East Africa, 1900-1950. *Journal of British Studies*, 5 (2), pp.115-38.
9. Beck, A. (2014) Colonial Policy and Education in British East Africa 1900-1950. [Online] Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-british-studies/article/abs/colonial-policy-and-education-in-british-east-africa-19001950/E58D64B8618FF8D04E4BDD8492BC4D52> [Accessed 23 March 2023].
10. Blackburn-Dwyer, B. (2012) *7 Ways Education Can Help End Extreme Poverty*. [Online] Available at: [www.globalcitizen.org/en/content](http://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content) [Accessed 20 January 2024].
11. Council on Foreign Relations (n.d.) World Order. [Online] Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/> [Accessed 1 January 2024].
12. Cree, A., Kay, A., and Steward, J. (2012) The economic and social cost of illiteracy: A snapshot of illiteracy in a global context. *World Literacy Foundation*, pp. 1-18.
13. CRIN (2018) *The Convention. Article 29: Aims of Education*. [Online] Available at: <https://archive.crin.org/en/home/rights/convention/articles/article-29-aims-education.html> [Accessed 14 May 2023].
14. Deb, S. (2015) The Human Development Index and Its Methodological Refinements. *Social Change*, 45(1), pp. 131–136.
15. Estoque, R.C. and Murayama, Y. (2014) Social–ecological status index: A preliminary study of its structural composition and application. *Ecol. Indic.* 2014, 43, pp. 183–194.
16. Heggoy, A.A. (1973) Education in French Algeria: An essay on cultural conflict. *Comparative Education Review*, 17(2), pp. 180-197.

17. Hofstetter, R. and Schneuwly, B. (2013) The International Bureau of Education (1925–1968): a platform for designing a chart of world aspirations for education. *European Educational Research Journal*, 12(2), pp. 215-230.
18. Hofstetter, R. and Schneuwly, B. (2020) The International Bureau of Education: A Precursor of the UNESCO and the Factory of its Pedagogical Guidelines? (1934–1968). *Encounters in Theory and History of Education*, 21, pp. 24-51.
19. Hofstetter, R. and Schneuwly B. (2024) Education Is a Political Issue. In: The International Bureau of Education (1925–1968). *Global Histories of Education*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [Online] Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-41308-7\\_17](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-41308-7_17) [Accessed 24 February 2024].
20. Horne, A. (2002) *A Savage War of Peace*. London: Pan Books.
21. Humanium (1990) *World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to meet basic learning need*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.humanium.org/en/world-declaration-on-education-for-all/> [Accessed 16 October 2023].
22. Johnson, B. and Al-Hamad, A. (2011) Trends in socio-economic inequalities in female mortality, 2001–08. Intercensal estimates for England and Wales. *Health Statistics Quarterly* (52) Winter 2011.
23. Katiyar, S.P. (2022) *Adult Illiteracy: A Global Social Problem*. In: Baikady, R., Sajid, S., Przeperski, J., Nadesan, V., Rezaul, I., Gao, J. eds. *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Problems*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
24. Kellogg, N. C. (2018) *Improvements For Girls' Education In Mali*. [Online] Available at: <https://borgenproject.org/improvements-for-girls-education-in-mali/> [Accessed 19 February 2024].
25. King, Martin Luther (1947) *The Purpose of Education*. [Online] Available at: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/purpose-education> [Accessed 12 January 2024].
26. Koehler-Derrick, G. and Lee, M.M. (2023) War and Welfare in Colonial Algeria. *International Organization*, 77(2), pp. 263-293.
27. Macketiani, C., Imbovah, M., Imbova, N., and Gakungai, D. K. (2016) Development of Education in Kenya: Influence of the Political Factor beyond 2015 Mdgs. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(11), pp. 55-60
28. MGD Monitor (2107) *Achieve Universal Primary Education*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.mdgmonitor.org/mdg-2-achieve-universal-primary-education/> [Accessed 13 January 2023].
29. Moretti, G. A. S. (2016) *Education through the lens of sustainable human development*. *International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC) No. 135*. [Online] Available at: [http://www.ipc-undp.org/pub/eng/WP135\\_Education\\_through\\_the\\_Lens\\_of\\_Sustainable\\_Human\\_Development.pdf](http://www.ipc-undp.org/pub/eng/WP135_Education_through_the_Lens_of_Sustainable_Human_Development.pdf) [Accessed on 25 May 2023].
30. Musyimi, D. M. (2023) An Empirical Analysis of Foreign Remittances, Education Index, and Human Development in Kenya. *East African Journal of Business and Economics*, 6(1), pp. 211-225.
31. Nainggolan, L. E., Lie, D., Nainggolan, N. T. and Siregar, R. T. (2022) How Determinants of the Human Development Index Impact Indonesia. *Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Sharia Economics (IIJSE)*, 5(2), pp. 687-700.
32. OECD (2018) *The future of education and skills Education 2030*. [Online] Available at: [https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20\(05.04.2018\).pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20(05.04.2018).pdf) [Accessed 18 February 2023].
33. OECD (2021) *OECD Indicators. Life expectancy by sex and education level*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/> [Accessed 14 May 2023].
34. OECD (2022) *The Short and Winding Road to 2030: Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/publications/the-short-and-winding-road-to-2030-af4b630d-en.htm> [Accessed 21 May 2023].
35. Okello, V. and Ocheng, M. K. (1996) *Curriculum studies*. Kampala: Makerere University.
36. Peck, L. (1953) Guiding emotional development. In: Peck, L. ed. *Child psychology: A dynamic approach*. [Online] Available at: <https://psycnet.apa.org/buy/2014-25380-011> [Accessed 29 January 2024].
37. Porcher, P. (2020) *State and School in Europe (Nineteenth—Twenty-first Century)*, Encyclopédie d'histoire numérique de l'Europe [Online] Available at: <https://ehne.fr/en/encyclopedia/themes/education-teaching-and-professional-training/educational-democratization-and-inequality/state-and-school-in-europe-nineteenth%20AD%E2%80%93twenty-first-century> [Accessed 13 June 2023].
38. Sagar, A. D. and Najam, A. (1998) The Human Development Index: A Critical Review. *Ecological Economics*, 25(3), pp. 249-264.
39. Sarda, V., Karmarkar, Y., Lakhota, N. and Sharma, S. (2019) An Insight Into The Stage Of Global Human Development Using Human Development Indices. *Prestige International Journal of Management and Research*, 12(1/2), pp. 82-87.
40. Thomas, R. G. (1974) Education in Northern Ghana, 1906-1940: A Study in Colonial Paradox. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 7(3), pp. 427–467.
41. Țoțan, L. and Dawed, R. (2023) Equity challenges in Romanian education: Towards sustainable education for all students. *Revista De Management Comparat International*, 24(4), pp. 600-607.
42. UNESCO (1948) *International Year-Book of Education*. [Online] Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/in/document> [Accessed 13 November 2023].

43. UNESCO (1990) *Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs*. [Online] Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000127583> [Accessed 23 November 2023].
44. UNESCO (2017) *Education for Sustainable Development Goals*. Learning Objectives. Paris, Francia: UNESCO. [Online] Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002474/247444e.pdf> [Accessed 20 January 2023].
45. UNICEF (n.d.) *Education Mali*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/mali/en/education> [Accessed 1 March 2024].
46. UNICEF (n.d.) *The Right to an Education is one of the most important principles in becoming a Rights Respecting School*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/the-rrsa/the-right-to-education/> [Accessed 18 May 2023].
47. United Nations (1920) *Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.un-documents.net/gdrc1924.htm> [Accessed 18 May 2023].
48. United Nations (1948) *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR). [Online] Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> [Accessed 18 May 2023].
49. United Nations (1966) *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights> [Accessed 12 November 2023].
50. United Nations (2022) *Human Development Report 2021/2022*. [Online] Available at: <https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2021-22> [Accessed 12 March 2023].
51. United Nations (2023a) *Gender Parity*. Available at: SDG Indicators Database, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2023). [Online] Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/database> [Accessed 23 January 2024].
52. United Nations (2023b) *Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) 2023*. [Online] Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/gsdrgsd2023> [Accessed 21 January 2023].
53. United Nations (2010) *Millennium Development Goals*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> <https://www.undp.org/publications/un-millennium-development-goals-report-2010> [Accessed 16 August 2023].
54. United Nations General Assembly (2015) *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25th September 2015*. [Online] Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/291/89/PDF/N1529189.pdf?OpenElement> [Accessed 13 January 2023].
55. United Nations Human Rights (UNHR) (1990) *World Declaration on Education for All*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/resources/educators/human-rights-education-training/9-world-declaration-education-all-1990> [Accessed 28 January 2024].
56. Urch, G. E. (2017) *Education and Colonialism in Kenya*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/history-of-education-quarterly/article/abs/education-and-colonialism-in-kenya/F427620B97921DE1A6C994D2152BC87B> [Accessed 13 January 2023].
57. WHO (n.d.) *Nutrition Landscape Information Systems*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.who.int/data/nutrition/nlis/info/human-development-index> [Accessed 14 January 2024].
58. World Bank (2017) *Higher Education*. [Online] Available at: [https://web.archive.org/web/20171210021931/http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/tertiaryeducation#what\\_why](https://web.archive.org/web/20171210021931/http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/tertiaryeducation#what_why) [Accessed 11 February 2023].
59. World Bank (2023) and Lee and Lee (2016) *Education*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/overview> Worldwide Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Education by Gender between 1820 and 1945) [Accessed 1 February 2024].
60. Our World in Data: UNESCO via World Bank (2024a) *Primary Education Completion*. [Online] Available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/global-education#all-charts> [Accessed 23 January 2024].
- 61.
62. Our World in Data: UNESCO via World Bank (2024b) *Gender Parity* [original data]. [Online] Available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/global-education#all-charts> [Accessed 14 March 2024].
63. Young, D. (2014) *Enterprise for All – The Relevance of Enterprise in Education*. BIS: London.

<sup>i</sup> 58 member states that attended this forum, 48 voted to ratify the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and no member state voted against the Declaration; eight abstained, and two did not vote. Abstentions: 8, BYELO RUSSIAN SSR: now known as The Republic of Belarus, Czechoslovakia: dissolved into the Check Republic and Slovakia, Poland, Saudia Arabia, USSR, Ukrainian SSR: now known as Ukraine, Union of South Africa: now known as South Africa. The 2 non-voting countries were Honduras and Yemen.

<sup>ii</sup> Executive Secretary: Inter-Agency Commission at the World Conference on Education for All 1990.

<sup>iii</sup> The completion rate of primary education from 2000 to 2015 may include a share of people 3-5 years above the expected age of completion who have completed their primary education.