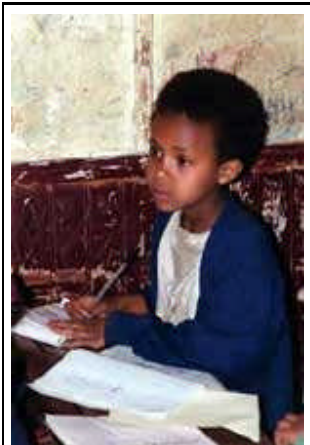


EDUCATION AND POVERTY – a lot to learn

“Every boy and girl around the world has a right to expect that we will do all we can to ensure that they will enjoy their right to an education.” (Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations 2006).

Education isn't just about getting a good job. It changes lives in many ways. It's essential for self-esteem, financial security, social justice, health, and in the long run, for community and economic development. It enables people to be effective citizens and participate in community decision making. It empowers people to be involved in local or national governments.

Yet for many of the world's poorest people, it's not an option. In 2000, over 115 million children were still not in school – 94 percent were in developing countries. With a little financial support, teacher training or the building of a new school, communities can give their children the education they deserve.



When she's asked why education means so much to her at such a young age, Wonishet in Ethiopia replies, "People who go to school have a good life, they never sleep in the streets. Those people speak nicely and their families love them."

When school is a luxury

According to the United Nations, around 40 percent of children who are not in school live in sub-Saharan Africa. Another 41 percent live in South Asia and over 15 percent are in the Middle East and North Africa.

But enrolment does not mean completion. In developing countries, children may enrol in school and drop out for various reasons. In Africa, only 62 percent of pupils complete their primary education. In Niger – a West African country which is one of the poorest countries in the world – less than a quarter of 15–24 year olds are literate.

Why aren't children in class?

Often poor parents can't afford the fees to send their children to school, and need help to supplement their incomes. Or instead of being in the classroom, children spend all day fetching water or working in the fields just to get food.

Globally, there are 246 million children aged between five and 17 who work. One in every eight of the world's 5-17 years olds – 179 million – are estimated to work in the worst forms of child labour which includes slavery-like situations or work that is hazardous and harmful to a child's physical or mental health.

The location of a school can also be a problem, especially for children living in remote rural areas. They are forced to walk long distances, sometimes for hours, to reach their school. There may not even be a secondary school in the entire region.

In some of the poorest regions, children that do attend primary school rarely go on to secondary education because of a lack of resources or qualified teachers. Schools are often so run down that children are forced to learn outside, under trees, without books, blackboards or pens. In Somalia – where there has been war for a decade – there hasn't been a teacher graduate for 10 years. Indeed, armed conflict or war in a country also makes it very difficult for children to attend school.

To add to the problem, growing numbers of children in poor regions have been orphaned by HIV and AIDS. Many households are headed by children caring for siblings. They work long hours just to survive and there's no time to go to school. Health problems like HIV and AIDS, malaria and malnutrition also impact on children attending school.

What changes are taking place?

World Vision's community development work gives children the opportunity to have at least a basic education. Non-government organisations like World Vision work with communities to train teachers, build schools and help with essential school supplies like books, pencils and desks. At the same time, World Vision helps parents understand the importance of education for their children. Work in improving access to safe drinking water and providing health care also increases the opportunities for children to attend school. Healthy children are more likely and able to attend school and engage in learning.

The Australian government is funding improvements in the quality of primary education in disadvantaged Islamic schools in Indonesia, as well as schools in Samoa, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Internationally, the United Kingdom has significantly increased funding for primary education projects in Africa.



At school in Uganda – teacher Gertrude received an education through child sponsorship and is now able to pass on her knowledge and enthusiasm to a new generation.

Good news in education

Bangladesh, Kenya, Malawi, Niger, Pakistan, Brazil and Guinea are a few examples where government leaders have recently taken significant steps towards abolishing school fees, offering stipends for girls and increasing spending on education. In the past 15 years, Guinea has increased primary school enrolments from 25 percent to nearly 70 percent.

In 2001, debt relief allowed Tanzania to build 1,000 new primary schools and provide free education for all children. As a result, enrolment increased from 59 percent to 89 percent in two years. However, alongside the increased numbers of children attending school, there is also a great need to improve the quality of teaching in many of these countries.

For you to do

1. What are six factors that cause over 100 million children to miss out on primary education?

- | | |
|-------------|------------|
| (i) _____ | (ii) _____ |
| (iii) _____ | (iv) _____ |
| (v) _____ | (vi) _____ |

2. How can education influence the lives of people and their communities?
