

# *Success and Failure in the Global Campaign for Education for All: What Now?*

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## **Introduction**

Ladies and Gentlemen: and now for something completely different! Well, perhaps not completely different, but different. You have been hearing in this lecture series about education in Canada with a focus on the notion of trust.

This evening I shall put in the wide-angle lens and look at education in the world with a focus on international cooperation, which is a rather important manifestation of trust in this era of globalisation. My title is *Success and Failure in the Global Campaign for Education for All; What Now?*

But let me say first what a pleasure it is to be here. I live in Vancouver and it is always salutary to traverse this huge and extraordinary country of ours a *mari usque ad mare*, from the Pacific to the Atlantic. I like being in Halifax you should know that decisions made here in Halifax in 2000 are a major influence on my work.

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL), which I head, reports to the Commonwealth Ministers of Education, who meet in conference every three years. In 2000 they met in here in Halifax and in that millennium year two contrasting trends converged. The largest gathering of heads of government ever assembled at the United Nations had made a commitment to eradicate global poverty by agreeing the Millennium Development Goals. I shall return to them.

Yet that same year the dotcom frenzy swept the world. Prophets and IT vendors vied with each other to declare that all education would soon take place on a computer screen. Traditional methods of teaching and learning were headed for the dustbin of history.

The convergence of these trends was particularly challenging for the 32 small states with populations of two million or less – often much less – that constitute two-thirds of the membership of the

Commonwealth. The Ministers from these small countries felt that they did not have the critical mass of people, equipment or expertise to punch their weight in the new eWorld. They decided to crack the challenge by aggregating their efforts and working together. They decided to create the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth as a network for collaboration and asked COL to help them.

I am proud to say that when we meet the Ministers in June, nine years after the Halifax decision, we can report significant success. Hundreds of government officials and staff members of tertiary institution have been trained in advanced ICT skills; a new Transnational Qualifications Framework has been developed to facilitate course sharing; and eCourses available internationally from the tertiary institutions in these small states, which are spread all over the globe, will soon be available on a common portal.

This evening, however, I shall talk about basic education, not tertiary education. In that same millennium year UN agencies also convened over a thousand people, including representatives of 164 countries and over a hundred NGOs, to a World Forum in Dakar, Senegal. It agreed set of objectives and a campaign for achieving education for all – which I shall refer to as EFA.

Before I tell the story of that campaign I want to go back further into history and ask why we consider this goal of education so important. This audience may take its importance for granted, but historically the world's rulers have not, in general, attached much importance to education, either for others or for themselves. Having some trained doctors, lawyers and priests to serve you was, of course, a good thing. But most would have agreed with Quebec Premier Maurice Duplessis, who remarked in the middle of the last century that too much education was bad for the people.

My plan this evening is: to sketch the history of the idea of education for all; to tell the story the international campaign to achieve it; to note the major successes and failures of the campaign; and finally to suggest some answers to the challenges that success and failure pose.

## Why is Education for All Important?

*Education for peace, order and good government*

So why is education for all important?

Two centuries ago, in *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith argued for universal education on the grounds of public order and the preservation of freedom:

*'The more (ordinary people) are instructed the less liable they are to the delusions of enthusiasm and superstition, which, among ignorant nations, frequently occasion the most dreadful disorders. An instructed and intelligent people, besides, are always more decent and orderly than an ignorant and stupid one... They are more disposed to examine, and more capable of seeing through, the interested complaints of faction and sedition, and they are, upon that account, less apt to be misled into any wanton or unnecessary opposition to the measures of government. In free countries, where the safety of government depends very much upon the favourable judgment which the people may form of its conduct,*

*it must surely be of the highest importance that they should not be disposed to judge rashly or capriciously concerning it.'*

That is nicely put. I particularly like his phrase about 'the delusions of enthusiasm' – something to remember the next time you mouth the standard cliché that you are very excited about something!

This statement is a very good fit to Canada. Adam Smith would have readily signed up to our national aspiration of 'peace, order and good government'. Dare I suggest that the difference between Canada's education system – keyed to that sober aspiration – and that of the US – linked to the more flamboyant ambitions of 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' – is the fundamental reason why, in the present financial crisis, Canada's banking system has largely avoided the debacle south of the border?

## Education as a Human Right

Go fast forward from Adam Smith to the mid-20th century. By then access to education had come to be seen as a human right. It was incorporated into international law through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26) which said:

*'(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.'*

That statement does not need any commentary. But, since Adam Smith is sometimes thought of as the father of capitalism and privatisation, let me remind you that he also said:

*'For a very small expense the public can facilitate, can encourage and can even impose upon almost the whole body of the people, the necessity of acquiring those most essential parts of education'. This is a nice endorsement of the public duty to facilitate education for all.'*

## Education for Economic Growth

If we move forward again, to the late 20th century, we find that the focus of arguments justifying universal education had acquired an economic spin. Bodies like the World Bank began to talk about 'human capital development'.

Scholars have since reviewed carefully the relationships between economic development and a number of measures of educational expansion. Having found little correlation between economic growth and the expansion of primary education they examined claims for a stronger correlation with the expansion of secondary enrolment but showed that this did not hold up either. William Easterly concluded that 'education is another magic formula that has failed us on the quest for growth'.

But at the turn of this century the development economist and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen urged a more

holistic perspective on the role of education in development. For him the search for a single magic bullet that would destroy poverty and create steady economic growth was an illusion. He argued that we must take a broad and many-sided approach to development.

## Development as Freedom

Amartya Sen starts from the concept of development as freedom. For him development is a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. This broad process embraces all narrower views of development such as growth of individual incomes, facilities for education and health care, civil rights, technological progress and social modernisation. Freedom is central to the process of development for two distinct but complementary reasons. Increasing freedom is the measure of development and free people are the drivers of development.

This broad approach to development gives a vital role to education even if the expansion of schooling in a particular jurisdiction does not give an immediate economic pay-off.

The history of Japan shows that universal education should be seen as a basis for economic development rather than its cause. Japan greatly expanded education and health care before it broke out of poverty. But once other factors were favourable for economic growth the good levels of education and literacy allowed Japan to develop rapidly. In another example, once China had adopted a form of market economics it grew more rapidly than India because it already had higher levels of education and health care.

## Education as a Constituent of Development

Considering development as freedom makes education a component of development as well as a means for promoting it. Education fosters some freedoms directly and, since freedoms strengthen each other, it has a knock-on effect that promotes development generally. The notion of free people as the drivers of development also helps to change the concept of development from a process that is imposed on people by governments and development organisations to something that they do for themselves.

Amartya Sen illustrates this by pointing out that because of its strong emphasis on women's education the birth rate in the Indian state of Kerala has fallen faster than it has in China, even with China's coercive one-child policy. Educating women is a perfect example of education being a constituent of development since its effect in reducing both fertility and infant mortality has been widely demonstrated. Indeed, the education of girls may also be the most powerful tool against climate change.

Since the industrial revolution the world's population has grown by a factor of seven and each person's impact on the environment is now, on average, seven times greater. This means that the impact of the human population on the planet has grown by a factor of almost fifty and curbing the population is the fastest way to reduce it.

## The Campaign to Achieve Education for All

Let me now recount briefly the story of the global campaign to achieve education for all, a campaign in which I was centrally involved during my years as head of Education at UNESCO from 2001-2004. Nations came to aspire to education for all at different times and in different ways.

In Japan, for example, modernisation started when the country opened its door to the West in 1867 in the Meiji Restoration. The national goal was to build a rich country and a strong army and the main objective of the Education Act of 1872 was to provide education to everybody, regardless of status and gender, so that the whole population would be able to enjoy happiness and prosperity equally.

The Act stated that *'learning is the key to success in life, and no man can afford to neglect it. ... everyone should subordinate all other matters to the education of his children. ...Henceforth, through out the land, without distinction of class and sex, in no village shall there be a house without learning, in no house an ignorant person.'*

Across the Pacific, in the United States, the first compulsory school attendance act was passed by Massachusetts in 1852. However, this state had already legislated on education two hundred years earlier. The Massachusetts Act of 1642 placed on parents the responsibility for their children's basic education and literacy. Government officials were there to see that all children and servants could demonstrate competency and reading and writing. All this reflected the view that in a heterogeneous society the masses had to be educated in order to understand the written codes of the governing laws and documents of the new country.

In Europe, the legislation on education came later. Compulsory education was enacted in Britain in 1880 and free education in France in 1881. But, of course, legislation is only a first step. In all these countries the extent and quality of education have repeatedly returned as political concerns right up to the present day.

## The Jomtien Conference

At the international level I take up the story in 1990, when four agencies of the UN system convened the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand. The conference was convened because in 1985 some 105 million children aged between six and eleven were not in school, the majority of them girls. Forecasts suggested that the number of out-of-school children might double to 200 million by 2000.

The purpose of the Jomtien conference was to stimulate international commitment to a new and broader vision of basic education: to 'meet the basic learning needs of all, to equip people with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they need to live in dignity, to continue learning and to contribute to the development of their communities and nations'.

The outcome of Jomtien was a set of six targets, adopted by 155 governments, 33 intergovernmental

bodies and 125 non-governmental organisations that were to be reached by the year 2000. The targets addressed, in summary:

- The expansion of early childhood care.
- Universal completion of primary education.
- Improvement in learning achievement (with targets).
- Reduction of adult illiteracy.
- Expanded training in essential skills for youth and adults.
- General education for sustainable development.

An International Consultative Forum on Education for All was established to monitor and promote progress towards these targets. It organised various events, including a 1993 summit of the nine highest population developing countries (the E9), a mid-decade meeting to assess progress, and regional/country meetings to report on the country assessments that had been commissioned.

Despite these efforts the targets were not achieved. Indeed, in absolute terms the world actually went backwards. In 1990 100 million children aged 6 to 11 were not in school and by 2000 this number had grown to 125 million.

Why was Jomtien such an embarrassing failure? Why were the participants in the Jomtien conference, in the words of one critic, ‘as ineffectual as they were well meaning’?

Those who had set the Jomtien targets put much of the blame on the failure to achieve them on six major changes that had impacted on education during the nineties. First, population growth – notably a 25% increase in the number of 6 to 14 year-olds in Africa – had moved the goalposts out of reach. Second, many countries were afflicted by conflict and natural disasters. Third, HIV/AIDS began to reverse the development gains of previous decades and had particularly dire effects on education systems as children became AIDS orphans and teachers died. Fourth, because of the break-up of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia education systems that had previously provided relatively complete coverage had been broken up. Fifth, there were major economic crises in many countries in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe (which may, of course, have been exacerbated by the development policies of the West). Finally, the exponential rise of communication technologies created a ‘digital divide’ that further increased the disparities between developed and developing countries.

The World Bank concluded:

*‘The six developments of the 1990s impacted strongly on education and have forced a fundamental rethinking of EFA... EFA can no longer be attained through business as usual, with the usual players.’*

## The Dakar Forum

Despite this statement the international community did appear to pursue business as usual by convening another World Forum on Education for All in Dakar, Senegal in 2000. It was convened by the same intergovernmental organisations and attracted over a thousand participants from 164 countries. Once again a set of six targets were agreed – very similar to those at Jomtien – with 2015 as a deadline for achieving the quantitative ones.

## The Millennium Declaration

The World Bank expected to be given the responsibility for leading this new post-Dakar campaign for EFA, but in the event the Framework for Action called on UNESCO to co-ordinate global efforts. Later in 2000, however, the world's heads of government met at the United Nations and approved the Millennium Declaration with a list of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These picked up, in summary form, two of the Dakar EFA goals:

- Achieve universal primary education:

Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

- Promote gender equality and empower women:

Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.

The World Bank, which was given a key role in driving forward the wider campaign to achieve all the MDGs, subsequently focused most of its work in education on these two goals. From then on the World Bank used the term EFA to refer to Universal Primary Education (UPE) rather than to the broader agenda articulated at Dakar.

## The Fast-Track Initiative

After a few false starts the World Bank began bringing the international donors together to support the UPE campaign under what was called the Fast-Track Initiative (FTI) (although some Ministers from developing countries were heard to mutter that juxtaposing the words 'fast' and 'World Bank' created an oxymoron). The aim of the FTI was to provide concentrated support to complete the task of achieving the quantifiable EFA goals in countries where conditions were judged to be propitious. A first group of 18 low-income and low enrolment countries were selected as recipients for early external assistance.

The three goals of the FTI were: a) deeper commitment to education policy reform and the efficient use of resources in developing countries; b) increased and better coordinated aid from industrialised countries; c) and improved assessment based on better data.

The FTI injected a sense of urgency into the support for the UPE campaign, although some potential recipient countries felt that the definition of propitious conditions, meaning domestic policy reform, was too stringent. A 2002 Report identified 28 countries at risk of not achieving the three quantifiable EFA goals, yet only six were on the FTI list.

This kind of international intervention in national education systems generates many ethical issues and the responses to them can lead in different directions. Donor countries – and the US is particularly obsessive about this – often want to supervise the spending of the money themselves, allegedly so that they can provide reassurance to their taxpayers. This can preclude the sensible pooling of donor contributions to achieve greater effect and also leads to the ludicrous situation where hard-pressed Tanzanian civil servants have to provide some 1,400 reports per year to different donors.

The British, who have pioneered some sensible approaches to aid, prefer to give funds as budget support, simply injecting them into the treasury of the country with the proviso that they be used to achieve declared educational goals. But this, of course, moves the ethical challenge to the recipient country. Might it then move the national resources that it would otherwise have spent on education into the defence budget?

The World Bank's core issue is cost-effectiveness. It likes to see the research results of its many economists turned into policy. For example, its economists came up with what they considered was an optimum salary band for teachers in African countries and made this a guideline for countries receiving assistance. Imagine being a minister and being told that a condition of support is that you have to reduce the salaries of all your teachers by 30%. It was hardly practical politics.

So other donors worried whether the World Bank, which wanted countries to follow strict benchmarks like this, would accept the judgements of in-country donor groups that a national education sector plan was good enough to justify FTI funding. These are the questions of trust inherent in international collaboration.

However, despite all this by 2004 the Fast-Track Initiative was gaining traction. Seventeen donors had pledged \$1.3 billion for the period 2004-2011, although most of this came from the Netherlands, the UK, the European Commission and Spain. There was a similar concentration in recipient countries; with large grants to only five countries and thirteen others receiving less than \$10 million.

Today in 2009, however, it appears that many countries will still fail to achieve universal primary education by 2015. There is a shortfall of around \$1 billion in funding looming and if such deficits materialize, 'some countries currently receiving support will see aid flows interrupted and others may get no support at all'.

My purpose in summarising the history of the FTI to show that despite the good intentions expressed at the EFA conferences, securing the adequate donor support – and even collecting on pledges made – is not straightforward. The campaign to achieve Universal Primary Education has been a long and difficult

struggle and despite all the efforts and international arm-twisting many countries may still not make it by 2015.

## The Successes and Failures of UPE

But let us now take a bird's eye view and summarise the successes and failures of the campaign to achieve universal primary education.

I will then conclude with some comments about their implications.

The success – and we can be proud of this – is that substantial progress has been made in getting children into primary school. Numbers in primary school have increased much faster since 2000 than in the decade between Jomtien and Dakar. The average net enrolment rate rose from 54% to 70% between 1999 and 2006 in Sub-Saharan Africa and from 75% to 86% in South and West Asia. In sum, there were 40 million more children in school in developing countries in 2006 than in 1999. This success generates a first challenge: what opportunities will these children have to continue their schooling if they complete primary school – or even if they do not?

The obverse of the coin – the failure – was that in 2006 75 million children, 55% of them girls, were still not in primary school. Furthermore, on present trends there will still be some 29 million of children out of school by 2015 – a number almost equivalent to the population of Canada. This is a second challenge. What can be done to bring schooling to these youngsters?

## Open Schooling and Teacher Education at Scale

I take the challenge of success first. The success of the campaign for Universal Primary Education is creating a surge of children towards secondary schooling and there is nowhere for most of them to go. Given the vagaries of the campaign for UPE, not to mention the global economic downturn, it is extremely unlikely that the international development and donor community would sign up to organise and fund a campaign for Universal Secondary Education. In expanding secondary education countries are likely to be largely left to their own devices. Many will find the task well nigh impossible unless the cost of quality secondary education can be drastically reduced by using alternative methods.

This is the context in which the Commonwealth of Learning is helping to promote and expand the practice of open schooling in developing countries. The use of open and distance learning at the secondary level is not new. In Canada it goes back almost a century. However, in our country this has been a small-scale affair aimed, for instance, at children in very rural areas or with disabilities. What the developing world needs is open schooling at scale.

There are already some impressive examples. The National Institute for Open Schooling in India enrolls 300,000 pupils a year and alongside it there are ten state open schools serving the country in local languages. It is both effective and cost-effective. Namibia and Botswana are two other countries that have open schools operating effectively at scale. The Namibian College of Open Learning is the largest

educational institution in that country and its 25,000 pupils account for 40% of all secondary enrolments.

In a spirit of south-south cooperation COL is helping to share expertise between India and Africa. We consider that coping with the secondary surge will be the world's biggest educational challenge in the next decades. It cannot be solved by conventional means.

Countries that fail to achieve universal primary education are in a similar predicament when it comes to formulating a response. Getting the remaining 75 million children – twice the population of Canada – into school will require various strategies but, above all, the employment of more teachers. Open schooling is not so appropriate at primary level. Children need teachers present in class with them.

But the figures are daunting. Worldwide 18 million new teachers will be required by 2015, 3.8 million of them in Africa. Millions of untrained teachers already in post also need extra training.

This is another challenge that cannot be met by conventional approaches. The hard-pressed teacher education institutions in developing countries cannot produce new teachers on this scale by bumping up enrolments a little and packing more trainee teachers into each class. Fortunately Canada, among other countries, has already shown the way by using open and distance learning in teacher training. Indeed, in the 1970s, I was part of a team at the Université du Québec's Télé-université that used distance learning to reach all the secondary teachers in the Province, first for training in what was then called the new mathematics, and later for training in the teaching of French.

It worked very well and I like to think that Québec's impressive performance in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment owes something to the foundations we laid thirty years ago.

## Conclusion

I shall conclude there. After examining why increasing importance has been given to the aspiration of education for all in recent centuries I summarised the twenty year campaign to achieve it that began with the Jomtien conference in 1990. It has not been easy but thanks to great efforts at the national level in developing countries and significant support by some of the richer countries, the pattern of primary schooling has been transformed.

But success creates new challenges. As more children complete primary school the demand for secondary education will skyrocket and many governments will be unable to meet it without radically different approaches to schooling.

In some countries the challenge is the failure to achieve universal primary education. Converting failure to success is largely a matter of getting more and better teachers in to the classrooms. Here again, conventional approaches to teacher training are not up to the task and different strategies must be employed.

This is the context for two of the most important programmes of the Commonwealth of Learning. I would

like you to feel proud that Canada is host, as the other end of the country, to a small intergovernmental agency of the Commonwealth that is helping countries to address both of these crucial issues. Let us hope that before two more decades have elapsed we may be able to tick the box and say that education for all is a global reality.