

Op-ed for the G8 Summit

At their meeting in Canada later this month, the G8 will have it in their power to radically transform the lives of millions of children and adults worldwide – and to make a significant contribution to the UN’s goal of eradicating extreme poverty - by taking concrete steps to end the global crisis in education.

At least 113 million children are not enrolled in school; the majority of them are girls. Of those who do get inside a classroom, a high proportion drop out before learning to read, write and do simple sums. Unless urgent action is taken, they will join the ranks of nearly 1 billion illiterate adults in the world, not only unable to read or write but woefully ill-prepared to advance beyond their own daily survival struggle, to provide adequately for their families, or to fully participate in their communities.

A human right as critical to life as any, education’s impact extends far beyond the schoolroom. It is, for example, a powerful weapon against HIV/AIDS. It empowers young people with the knowledge they need to protect themselves and their community.

Education - quality education for every child - fosters a respect for human dignity and a tolerance for diversity that are foundational to international peace and human security.

In times of conflict and crisis, education restores structure to young lives and offers life-sustaining hope to children facing futures that are at best uncertain.

The year 2002 could go down in history as the year when the world looked up, and paid attention to the plight of the millions who are denied an education – and thus denied the opportunity to be a full and active partner in creating and building a world of peace and security.

Some progress has been made since the Dakar World Education Forum two years ago. At Monterrey, the United States, EU and Canada all said they will increase aid for the world’s poorest countries. At the World Bank meetings this April, an Action Plan for Universal Primary Education was agreed. This provides a serious strategy to ensure that every child in the world receives a full primary schooling, but only if it is backed by hard money from developing country governments and donors.

In May, at the UN Special Session on Children, member states and NGOs agreed to commit necessary resources and to work together to build “a world fit for children.” Four goals were established and education was an integral part of each one: promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protecting children from abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS.

The outcome of the G8 meeting will be decisive. Global education will be a prominent item on the G8’s agenda. We urge the G8 to deliver the financial backing that the Action Plan and the Dakar commitments urgently require. This cannot be achieved in a single grand gesture. It will take wave after wave of commitment and collaboration right up to 2015 and beyond.

Nor should the G8 limit their attention to a few favoured countries. Whilst we must start in those countries where we can have an immediate impact, we cannot ignore those countries where it is hardest for us to make a difference, including those countries in crisis or conflict where rebuilding education is an urgent and massive undertaking.

Over 95 million people have by now added their voice to the Say Yes for Children campaign as part of the global movement for children. This makes the movement the largest pledge campaign ever. The majority of these people say that the most important single intervention that can be made is to educate every child.

Young people understand the value of education as well as anyone. According to Gabriel Barros of the Mozambican National Students Union, “The priority of the country should be to give each single child a basic education in order to overcome the actual rates of illiteracy and to educate the population with enough knowledge to build their own future”.

Through enhanced support for education, the G8 can help to build ‘a world fit for children’

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