

Reuters

World falling behind on 2015 education goal

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By David Alexander

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Access to education increased dramatically over the past century but 323 million children worldwide are still not in school and efforts to achieve universal primary education by 2015 are likely to fail, a new study said on Wednesday.

Despite the findings, the study by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences said the goal of providing a high-quality education to all children could be achieved at a reasonable cost with more support and funding from governments worldwide.

"There's no question that it's possible," said David Bloom, one of the authors of the study. "It's a question of financial resources and it's a question of political will."

"We have cost estimates, for example, of what it would take and we're looking at numbers that are less than what the U.S. is spending on an annual basis in Iraq and Afghanistan," he said. The United States is currently spending about \$8 billion a month on the Iraq war.

In the past century, the number of primary children enrolled in school has grown from around 40 percent in all regions to about 86 percent, but many areas are lagging behind, especially sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.

Universal primary education has been the goal of several international initiatives. A 1990 global conference in Thailand set the year 2000 as the target date for universal primary education. When that goal was not met, a global forum in Senegal in 2000 set a new target date of 2015.

Bloom, an economist and demographer at Harvard, and co-author Joel Cohen, a professor of populations at Rockefeller and Columbia universities, said the study found the new target date was unlikely to be met and the goal needed to be expanded to include secondary education.

Not Even Close

"If we actually look at an extrapolation ... we're not going to come close to making 'education for all' by 2015," Bloom said. At current rates of progress, nearly 300 million children would not be enrolled in 2015, 114 million of them of primary school age.

Bloom said the goal of universal primary education for all was "not nearly ambitious enough" and that students who spend less than 10 years in school do not achieve many of the benefits of education.

"We ... need to pay much more attention to education access at the secondary level and we need to pay attention to educational quality," Bloom said. "It's not just a question of getting kids into schools, it's also a question of what you do with them once they're in school."

Cohen said the researchers calculated universal primary and secondary education would cost as much as \$70 billion more per year worldwide, \$7 billion of that for primary education and between \$27 billion and \$62 billion for secondary education.

He said \$70 billion would be less than three-tenths of a percent of the gross national income of rich countries.

"So the amounts of money we are talking about are not large compared to the resources available," he said.

Bloom said the study attempted to lay out a vision of what the world would look like, "how much better the world would be if instead of using our resources for military purposes we used them to ... get every kid in the world into school and provide them with quality education."

He acknowledged it was "an ideal vision" but said it was justified, not only because education is acknowledged as a human right and recognized as a contributor to strong societies, but also because it was good economics.

"Education provides considerable economic benefits, which is truly one of the best established ideas in the whole field of economics," Bloom said.

Voice of America

Study Says Universal Education is Attainable and Affordable

By Barbara Schoetzau

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A study sponsored by the private American Academy of Arts and Sciences shows that the goal of universal education is both attainable and affordable. From VOA's New York Bureau, correspondent Barbara Schoetzau has the story.

For years, international educators have stressed the importance of universal education as the best way to reduce poverty and improve public health and living standards for the world's people. In 2000 participants at two world conferences on education pledged to achieve universal education with a target date of 2015. But few expect universal education to be achieved by the deadline despite significant strides.

The privately funded study, undertaken by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, presents evidence that the goal of universal education can be achieved with relatively small contributions from wealthy nations.

Joel Cohen, a professor of population studies at the Rockefeller and Columbia universities, is a co-director of the study. He says the project grew out of his work studying the economic, environmental and cultural consequences of population growth and decline.

"By 2050 it is reasonable to expect that the global population will be different in four ways: bigger, older, more urban and more slowly growing," said Joel Cohen. "It will be bigger by two to four billion people and all of that growth will be in poor countries."

The study found that the goals set by world conferences in 2000 are far from being met, despite great strides since 1990. Co-director David Bloom of Harvard University's School of Public Health says the average enrollment of primary school age children across the globe has reached 86 percent. He estimates that about 64 percent of all secondary school age children are currently enrolled in secondary schools.

"The bad news is that even if education continues to expand at the pace that it did between 1990 and the early part of this century, our estimates indicate that 114 million primary school age children will not be enrolled in school by 2015, about one in six," said David Bloom.

Cohen and Bloom estimate that 185 million children of secondary school age, about one in four, will not be enrolled in schools by 2015. Unlike many studies, which focus on primary education, Cohen and Bloom stress the importance of secondary education also. Cohen says it is essential to address universal secondary education.

"The graduates of the secondary schools, some fraction of them, can be fed back to become teachers in primary schools and there is a shortage of well-qualified primary school teachers in many of these

countries," he said. "A second reason to do them together is that having a secondary system that has places increases the incentive for people to complete primary because they have a place to go next. It is not a dead end. If you want to operate in the global economy today, you have to have at least a good equivalent of a high school education."

The population experts say that small contributions from the world's wealthiest nations - about \$7 billion a year - can make enormous changes in improving global education within one decade.

Bloom says governments that made commitments to education such as Singapore and Korea show what can be accomplished. He calls it common sense to educate every child well.

"We found quite a lot of evidence that increased education goes along with great economic opportunity for individuals, lower population growth. Investments in education, improved health - and that works both ways in the sense that investments in health also improve school enrollment, learning capacity and cognitive development and also the quality of the overall educational experience," he said.

The study recommends discussions on regional, national and international levels to debate the issue.

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences is a Cambridge, Massachusetts-based group dedicated to the advancement of learning.

Education Week

Worldwide Education Achievable, Study Says

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By Kathleen Kennedy Manzo

Many countries are not on track to reach the goal of universal primary education by 2015, but greater political will and more help from wealthy nations could turn the situation around, maintains a report by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

In fact, the report asserts, increased efforts for expanding academic opportunities in developing nations -- and a relatively modest amount of additional funding for universal education -- could help more than 300 million additional children and youths worldwide attain an education through secondary school.

"Universal, high-quality primary and secondary education is achievable by the middle of the 21st century," the report says, "though probably not at the current rate of progress."

The report, "Educating All Children: A Global Agenda," by the academy, a Cambridge, Mass.-based independent policy research center, outlines an ambitious plan for improving educational access that goes beyond the goals of existing international initiatives, which have long focused on primary education, to include secondary school.

Providing opportunities for secondary education, according to the report, is likely to make primary schooling more attractive and productive and provide the economic benefits that come with a better-educated and more highly skilled citizenry.

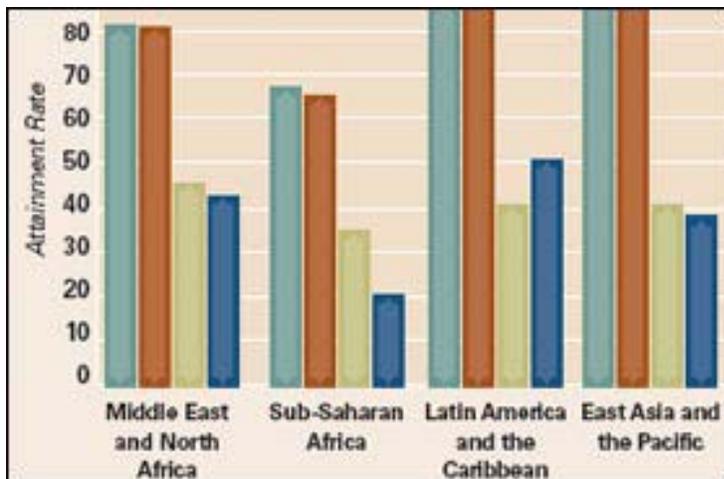
"Having a secondary education system increases the incentives for people to complete primary education," said Joel E. Cohen, a professor of populations at Rockefeller and Columbia universities in New York City and an editor of the report. "If you want to participate in the

global economy of today, you have got to have at least a good equivalent of secondary education.”

'Not Ambitious Enough'

At the World Education Forum in Senegal in 2000, 150 nations promised to push for the goal of ensuring a primary education for all the world's children by 2015.

At the current rate of change, researchers project that the goal of universal primary education by 2015 will not be met unless political and financial support increases. Two teams of researchers came up with varying sets of data, both of which are presented:



Source: American Academy of Arts and Sciences

The 2007 Global Monitoring Report, released by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, or UNESCO, in October, suggests that progress is being made in many parts of the world, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, in improving school-going rates and opportunities for girls. Indeed, some 21 million fewer school-age children worldwide were out of school in 2004 than in 1999, UNESCO found. Greater educational attainment tends to correlate with economic improvement, lower fertility rates, and other social benefits.

But more than 75 million primary-school-age children worldwide are still not in school, according to UNESCO. And more than 200 million youths are not in secondary school. Dozens of countries, in fact, are not expected to meet the goal of universal education over the next decade if they continue on the current track.

Despite the bad news, the new report argues that some political and monetary improvements could fuel even greater expansion of school programs in developing countries. An increase in contributions by wealthy nations of about \$70 billion annually -- representing just three-tenths of 1 percent of the gross income of the world's richest countries -- would finance universal education, Mr. Cohen said.

“The Education for All effort, we think, is not nearly ambitious enough,” said David E. Bloom, a professor of economics and demography at the Harvard University's school of public health and an editor of the report. “And there's also a need to pay attention to educational quality.”

Success in East Asia

Some international-development experts agree that universal education is feasible and will pay off for individual nations and the world at large.

"We've seen over the last 30 years a considerable increase in the number of children who are enrolled," Nicholas Burnett said last fall when the annual UNESCO report, which he oversees, was released. "All the studies support the finding that there are enormous payoffs for such [efforts], and they have the greatest payoff for disadvantaged children."

For an example of the difference universal schooling through high school can make, Mr. Bloom points to East Asia. Since the 1950s, he said, increased access to education has led, by some estimates, to nearly all primary-age children's attendance at school. Improvements in the quality of schools and teaching are credited with helping Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, out of poverty to become economic stars.

"A deep and early commitment to education [in those countries] was very powerful," Mr. Bloom said, "and key to equipping their kids with the skills they need to function in modern society."