Why some Education for All and millennium development goals will not be met: Difficulties with goals and targets

Keith M Lewin
University of Sussex

Abstract

This article argues that for a significant number of sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, the Education for All (EFA) goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) referring to education are unlikely to be achieved by 2015 but that with substantial external assistance countries at risk should make better progress. It argues that this will be possible only if (1) current status and starting points are clearly recognized, (2) links are made between the EFA and MDG goals, national development strategies on poverty reduction and theoretical considerations on the role of education in development, (3) access and equity issues are reconceptualized to reflect aspirations and specific patterns of participation, and (4) targets and indicative benchmarks adapted to context and starting points are adopted that nurture relationships between target-setters and getters and reconcile ambitions with sustainable financial demands across the education sector.

Status report

The Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2004) indicates that 47 countries worldwide had universal primary education by 2002. It estimates a further 20 may succeed by 2015, and 20 are considered at risk of not achieving the goal. A further 47 have little chance of achieving the goal or are judged very unlikely to succeed. About half of these are in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

Forty-nine countries had achieved gender equity at primary and secondary levels by 2002 and 14 were considered likely to do so by 2015. Seventy-nine were considered at risk of not achieving parity in enrolments by 2015, 43 of which are likely to fail because of inequity at secondary level and 24 at primary and secondary level. The majority of those likely to fail only at secondary level have more girls than boys enrolled; in contrast the majority of those likely to fail at both levels have more boys than girls enrolled. Most of these are in SSA.

Recent estimates suggest there are about 108 million primary school age children in SSA, about 91 million of whom are enrolled. At secondary level there are 92 million children and about 25 million enrolled. This means that at least 17 million children of primary school age and 67 million of secondary school age are out of school. In reality the numbers are much greater, since enrolment figures include large numbers of over-age pupils and repeaters. Enrolment estimates also fail to capture those who may be registered but not attending. Though reliable estimates of those not attending school across SSA are not available, it is reasonable to conclude that more than 25 million in the primary age group and 75 million of secondary age are excluded through not being enrolled or through being nominally enrolled but not attending.

What can we conclude? In the majority of SSA countries there are not yet enough school places to enrol all school age children at primary level, and many more are excluded from lower secondary schooling than primary. Secondary enrolments in lower-income SSA countries are very low, though lower secondary is increasingly seen as part of basic education and EFA (Lewin 2006b). Universal access to primary is becoming a problem for the 'last 20%', who are likely to be from the poorest sections of the population. The numbers excluded at secondary level are much greater than at primary level, and there is a predominance of children from households with high levels of income at secondary schools. Expanding fee-paying secondary schooling has equity implications that may result in greater than current differentiation and polarization of access.

EFA goals and MDG targets

The EFA goals (UNESCO 2000) have set an agenda for educational development in SSA that has been widely influential in shaping national plans and external assistance. The EFA goals are as follows:

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children
2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality
3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes
4. Achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults
5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality
6. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills

Three of these goals (2,4,5) can readily be translated into quantitative targets, although each retains qualitative dimensions, and three others (1,3,6) require judgements and can to some extent be proxied by data on access and learning outcomes. The EFA goals have been reinforced by the adoption of the MDGs (United Nations 2000), two of which (MDG2 – Achieve universal primary education by 2015, and MDG 3 – Promote gender equality and empower women through eliminating gender disparity in enrolment at primary and secondary level by 2005) overlap directly with the EFA goals. Much could be said about problems with the specification of these laudable goals and their uneven translation into policy and practice. Six points suffice.

First, predictably, goals with an apparently clear quantitative definition have been given far more prominence than those which require judgement and contextualization. Thus achieving enrolment rate targets – first of 100% primary enrolment, then 100% net enrolment rates (NERs) and now 100% completion to the end of primary, and parity in enrolments of girls and boys at primary and more recently secondary levels – have overshadowed attempts to address other EFA goals.

Second, some of these universal goals have a long history. International efforts to achieve universal primary education (UPE) date back to the UNESCO conferences of the 1960s, and more recently to the UPE targets for 2000 set at the 1990 Jomtien conference. Where time-bound targets have not been met in the past, they have been rolled forward, often without considered analysis of the reasons for failure. The gender parity goal for 2005 was missed and has similarly been rolled forward to 2015.

Third, although the goals appear to be independent of each other, in practice they interact and imply other goals that would need to be met if the primary goal is to be attained. Thus UPE cannot be achieved without an adequate supply of teachers drawn from increased numbers of secondary school graduates; universal primary completion is unlikely unless transition rates into secondary schooling are high enough to maintain motivation to complete primary; universal access to primary necessarily implies gender parity in enrolments; the investment required to substantially expand access to early childhood care and education competes with the resource demands of universal primary; improving adult literacy over 10 to 15 years may be most rapidly achieved by ensuring that all those who attend school leave literate.

Fourth, starting points are very different in different systems and the distance to be travelled varies widely. In some cases the goals will not be challenging because they have already been achieved; in others they will be unattainable and lack plausibility.

Fifth, the goals as specified mix rights-based approaches to service delivery with aspirations to achieve developmentally desirable outcomes. These may conflict. Thus including the last 20% in primary schooling may alleviate poverty less than investing in more equitable access to secondary schooling; meeting the special educational needs of some sub-populations may deny access to others.

Sixth, operational goals need to be converted to targets. If target-setters are not target-getters there is a risk that target ownership will be diffuse, accountability for target achievement unclear and methods of assessing success ambiguous. Amongst the problems that can arise are difficulties in translating macro targets – e.g. 100% enrolment of primary age children – into meaningful activities at lower administrative levels (who is responsible for ensuring all children attend?), problems of motivation and reward (what is the consequence of meeting or failing to meet targets institutionally and individually?) and issues concerned with assessing goal achievement (which definition of completion rates is appropriate, and how easy or difficult is it to assess net enrolment rates?).

Underlying these and other problems are three sets of issues.

The first is the lack of articulation of the EFA goals and MDGs with development theory linking investment in education with developmentally desirable outcomes and specific national contexts.

The second is that achieving the set goals requires analytic purchase on the nature of the problems that have prevented them from being achieved in the past and, with changing circumstances, may prevent them from being achieved in the future. Re-conceptualizing the challenges presented by the goals in a contextually grounded way is a prerequisite for evidence-based policy that might just succeed where past attempts have failed.

The third is to revisit the issues that surround the EFA goals and MDGs and the indicative targets and benchmarks they generate. This is needed to develop sustainable implementation plans that can be financed with an appropriate mix of domestic revenue and external assistance. The next sections discuss these issues.

Theoretical perspectives on development, EFA and the MDGs

The discourse surrounding EFA and the MDGs is not grounded in any explicit single set of propositions about the role of education in development and the extent to which educational access and achievement are of themselves part of development. This is perhaps not unexpected given the nature of the process through which the EFA goals were generated and the geo-political dimensions of gaining consensus for the MDGs. However, without propositional frameworks that link educational investment and desired developmental outcomes, albeit with different contextual nuances, there are obvious risks that even if EFA goals are achieved, development more broadly defined may not take place.

Arguably the events that led to the Jomtien conference were underpinned by a kind of 'Washington consensus' that development could be accelerated through investment in human capital, that a new thrust to universalize primary education was needed because social rates of return at this level were generally very positive, that the developmental benefits of schooling were substantial (greater agricultural productivity, lower infant mortality and morbidity, etc.) and that economic growth (and just possibly improved income distribution, political stability and better governance) would follow from raising the average

educational level of the poor. The result was a shift from a previous emphasis on higher-level skills development (technical and vocational education, higher education investment) to a growing prioritization of basic education that could be externally supported as a vector for development. Though this did not meet with initial enthusiasm on the part of at least some SSA governments, gradually it became a dominant orthodoxy.

Developments were also shaped by post-colonial political events. Most obviously, African socialist approaches to development lost ground, partly as a result of their own failures to generate development and partly as a result of the collapse of sponsors amongst the socialist states of Eastern Europe and market-oriented transformations in China. Neo-liberalism began to hold sway with strong messages about marketization of service delivery, smaller state bureaucracies and more integration into the world economy.

Most recently, since the Dakar World Education Forum (2000), rights-based approaches have gained prominence in the international debates, stressing that equitable access to reasonable quality education is denied to large proportions of the population of many developing countries, that this is unacceptable and that both governments and development partners have obligations to deliver on commitments they have made. Debt relief tied to educational investment has become a reality, and, through a variety of mechanisms including the Fast Track Initiative, development partners have pledged to support countries that produce viable educational development plans. The G8 has made clear its intentions to transform the volumes and modalities of external assistance.

Meanwhile, globalization has become a new reality for most of SSA, with impacts on rights-based approaches to education and development, for instance through the activities of international NGOs, and on educational practice and process in areas such as convergence in curricula and examining systems, advocacy of child-centred pedagogies, cross-national monitoring of achievement and introduction of capitation funding systems. Information on every aspect of educational practice and process is more widely available than in earlier periods and this will further increase with the spread of information technology. External assistance programmes have become more homogeneous with the development of sector-wide approaches and general budget support reflecting the desire to replace ad hoc project support with sector-wide plans supported by several development partners. In developing educational plans that qualify for external assistance, various benchmarks and indicative frameworks now exist that generate convergence, at least at national level. These tend to be normative more often than not, based on best-practice, selective comparisons with 'successful countries' and convenient rules of thumb. However, they are also formative in that they compress complex system realities into homogenizing policy and practice.

The theoretical underpinning of EFA and the MDGs is beyond the scope of this article. However, reflection in this area provokes some key dilemmas that need addressing if the goals and targets set are to endure and be translated into the kind of poverty reduction, equity and growth assumed to be at the core of development.

First, though it is fairly obvious that increased productivity, which generates wealth, is

associated with higher levels of knowledge and skill, how this equation operates in many SSA economies remains largely unknown. What kind of knowledge and skills are appropriate, one may ask, which leads to questions of curriculum, teaching and learning, and how do these relate to productivity, whether in agriculture, the informal sector, the modern sector or elsewhere?

Second, though it is easy to demonstrate in every SSA country that the more educated have higher incomes, and that *ipso facto* educational access is poverty alleviating, how this is changing with expanded access is unclear. Most obviously the high rates of return associated with primary schooling are likely to be falling as labour markets saturate with primary school graduates. There is some evidence of concave rates of return developing with little additional benefit to those who continue to attend for additional years until they reach a threshold of scarcity, which may now be upper secondary or higher education.

Third, achieving EFA and the MDGs is increasingly a problem in terms of reaching the last 20%. One orthodoxy is that there may be a threshold of acquired basic education (and for that matter literacy) below which sustained development is unlikely. However, there may also be an upper threshold above which investment in extending access to basic education is essentially consumption to increase social welfare rather than poverty alleviation. Almost certainly the rate of return on the margin will be low, since in accessing difficult to reach groups with special needs the costs of provision are likely to be above-average. Subsequent economic benefits are likely to be below-average.

Fourth, thresholds may also apply to the pursuit of gender equity in schooling. Where differences in enrolments between boys and girls are large (greater than 5%?), then the transaction costs of special intervention programmes may be justified if demonstrably effective. At some threshold (partly determined by overall enrolment rates) it may be more cost-effective to focus resources on increasing overall enrolment whilst maintaining gender equitable policy and practice.

Fifth, equity of educational access in SSA is most strongly determined by household income (Lewin 2006c). The effects on access generally decrease in the early primary grades, but usually increase as drop-out differentially affects the poor. Access to secondary schooling is strongly related to household income. Differences between rural and urban access can be striking, especially where most secondary provision is urban or peri-urban. Gender differences in SSA are almost always greater at secondary level than at primary. There are developmental questions: whether equity is conceived of at the individual or household level (bearing in mind also average family size) and whether it is more important to address inequity at primary level, which affects more students, or at secondary level, where inequity is much greater.

Sixth, decentralization is widely promoted as a mechanism that should enhance progress towards the EFA goals and the MDGs. But this is not self-evidently the case. There are several issues. These include clarity about what is to be decentralized – school governance is very different from curriculum development, text book production or section examinations.

Decentralized school financing may be attractive if capacity exists to manage funds, accountability and audit are effective and formula funding or some other mechanism can generate consistent and reliable disbursement. It may also fail where bottlenecks exist in disbursement, checks and balances are ineffective and administrative capacity is weak. Local authorities may or may not share national priorities and the micro politics of local power structures may be exclusive rather than inclusive.

Seventh, the role of the private sector in achieving EFA and the MDGs remains a constant source of debate, as it does with other forms of public service delivery. It is clear that experience from other sectors, such as water and health, cannot be directly applied to educational service provision (Lewin 2006a, Lewin and Sayed 2005). Once the principle of universal free primary schooling is accepted, it is clear that private providers should only recruit those able to pay on an elective basis. No such clarity exists above primary level in much of SSA. Most secondary schooling is fee-paying, and often, even in public systems, the bulk of the costs are privately supported from fees and other contributions. However, various analyses demonstrate that full-cost non-state schooling in low enrolment SSA is unlikely to be affordable to those outside the top 20% of household incomes. This limits the extent to which expanded access will be provided by unsubsidized non-state providers.

Eighth, several SSA countries, such as Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, have nearly achieved universal primary education in the past but have been unable to sustain it. The more obvious causes – conflict and civil unrest, economic mismanagement and macroeconomic failure, the impact of HIV and AIDS, lack of administrative capacity – have to be analysed with the less obvious, such as lack of sustained political will, ineffective regional policies, discrimination against particular social groups, internal and cross-border migration, and poor professional practice.

Reconceptualizing access in the context of EFA and the MDGs

The most prominent target for EFA and the education MDGs relates to universalizing access to primary schooling (or more generally now basic education through to grade 9). This article argues that reconceptualization is needed if this is to be achieved in SSA, building on work undertaken by the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE – www.create-rpc.org).

Access issues

The central problem EFA and the MDGs address is how to increase meaningful access for girls and boys between the ages of five and 15. The numbers are large. Even where gross primary enrolment rates exceed 100%, national data indicate that attendance may be below 70%, completion rates may fall below 50%, and fewer than 20% may attend lower secondary. Achievement data often show a minority acquiring basic learning skills by grade 5. The EFA Global Monitoring Reports (UNESCO 2002-2005) indicate the scale of the challenge, and its changing urban and rural characteristics.

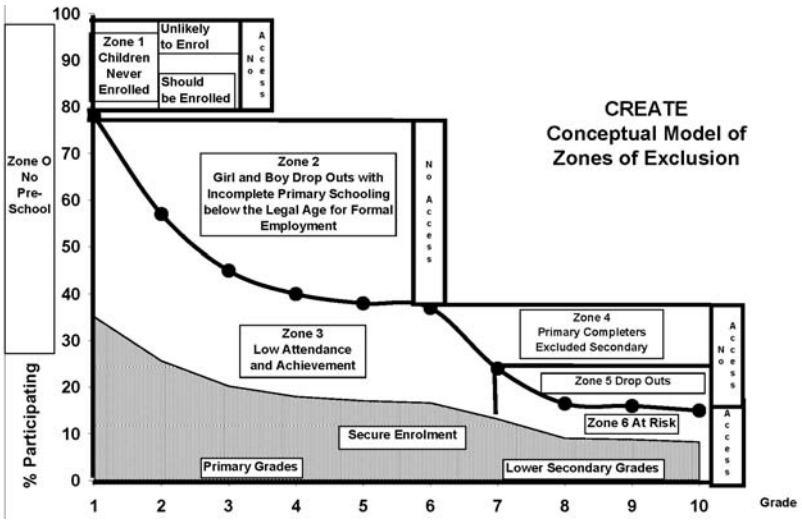
Initial enrolment and progression are a result of the interaction of both supply *and* demand. Many EFA programmes present access as a supply-side issue that can be resolved if enough school places are provided. This was always insufficient to achieve schooling for all (Colclough with Lewin, 1993). The supply of school places remains important for those initially excluded and for those learning under conditions that compromise successful achievement. Critical supply-side issues include school location, teacher deployment and training, availability of learning materials, and safety, especially for girls (see e.g. Dunne and Leach 2004; Lewin and Stuart, 2003; Colclough et al. 2003). However, since the Jomtien conference, expanded enrolments have not always been accompanied by falling repetition and drop-out. For instance, in Malawi the number of primary school completers has remained static over ten years despite a 60% overall increase in enrolments. Demand may soften as gross enrolment rates (GERs) rise.

Patterns of demand shape entry, progression, completion and transition to lower secondary, and are often gendered. Rapidly expanding enrolments have been associated with changing perceptions of the relevance and effectiveness of schooling and of the benefits of participation (Lewin and Caillods 2001). The problems of capturing and retaining the last 20%, and increasing promotion, completion and transition, are inextricably linked to decisions to participate. These are partly related to the direct costs of schooling but are also dependent on 'family strategies' (Laugharn 2001) and many other factors. How demand has been changing, and how supply interacts with demand, are central concerns (Mukudi 2004; Boyle et al. 2002; Rose and Al-Samarrai 2001; Canagarajah and Nielsen 1999; Ravallion and Wodon 1999).

Exclusion from basic education is a process culminating in an event with many causes. A new research programme, CREATE, uses the term 'zones of vulnerability' to describe the various spaces where children are included, excluded or at risk. Initial access has little meaning unless it results in (1) regular attendance, (2) progression, (3) meaningful learning and (4) appropriate access to post-primary education. Children falling into these zones of vulnerability are the subject of our research, especially disadvantaged groups, such as girls, HIV/AIDS orphans, displaced people and ethnic minorities. Figure 1 presents a cross-sectional model of access. It illustrates how enrolments decline through the primary grades and how those attending irregularly and achieving poorly fall into 'at risk' zones. In this hypothetical model half of the primary completers are selected into lower secondary school. where attrition continues (Lewin 2007).

Zone 1 contains those denied any access. Expansion of conventional schooling can enrol a proportion of these children, but is unlikely to embrace all by 2015. More research is needed on the circumstances that surround those without access to orthodox schooling, e.g. nomadic groups (Aikman and el Haj 2005), those in low population density areas (Little 2006) and those in extreme poverty (Kabeer et al. 2003), to establish how their basic education needs might best be met. This additional research could identify whether different modes of service delivery offer promise (Chowdury et al. 2003) and whether opportunities to join mainstream schooling will be sufficient to extend access to all. It is likely that the best solution for most of

Figure 1: Access and zones of exclusion from primary and secondary schooling



those currently excluded from grade 1 is extending the reach of the existing formal system. Analysis is needed of the gaps in provision (both rural and urban) and of feasible, pro-poor and affordable strategies. These should recognize the growing attention being given to pre-school.

Zone 2 includes the great majority of children who are excluded *after* initial entry. Typically, drop-out is greatest in the early grades, with a substantial subsequent push-out at the transition to secondary school. Precursors to drop-out include repetition, low achievement, previous temporary withdrawals, low attendance, late enrolment, poor teaching, degraded facilities, very large classes, household poverty, child labour and poor health and nutrition (Boyle et al. 2002; Canagarajah and Nielsen 1999; Fentiman, Hall and Bundy 1999; Nokes et al. 1998). Those dropping out usually become permanently excluded with no pathway back to re-enter. The zone includes disproportionate numbers of girls, HIV/AIDS orphans and others in vulnerable circumstances (Pridmore et al. 2005). It may be influenced by child labour practices (Ravallion and Wodon 1999).

Zone 3 includes those in school but at risk of dropping out. These children might be low-attenders, repeaters and low-achievers. Children who remain formally enrolled in school may be silently excluded if their attendance is sporadic, if their achievement is so low that they cannot follow the curriculum or if they are discriminated against for socio-cultural reasons. Nutritional deficiencies and sickness can compound these problems. Too little is known of how the range of influential factors is changing as EFA evolves, how they result in decisions to enrol and attend at different grade/age levels, and how they impact on different key disadvantaged groups.

Zone 4 contains those excluded from lower secondary school as a result of failing to be selected, being unable to afford the costs or dropping out before successful completion of primary. This exclusion is important for EFA, since transition rates into secondary affect

demand for primary schooling, primary teacher supply depends on secondary graduates, and gender equity at the secondary level is an MDG. Access to secondary schooling promotes the social mobility needed to give poor households more access to higher-income employment.

Zone 5 includes those children who have entered lower secondary school but who fail to progress to the end of the cycle. In most countries lower secondary is now considered part of basic education. Many who fail to complete the cycle are likely to be below the legal working age if they are in the appropriate grade for their age. The reasons for drop-out include poor performance, affordability and loss of interest. Demand to remain in school may weaken as a result of high opportunity costs where work is available.

Zone 6 contains lower secondary children at risk of drop-out. As with Zone 3, some will be silently excluded though enrolled and at risk as a result of poor attendance and low achievement. Costs and affordability are also likely to be significant.

Zone 0 refers to pre-school participation. This is very poorly detailed, though it is clear that in low enrolment countries large majorities experience little or no access to organized pre-school, and those that do are often enrolled in high-cost private facilities. This almost certainly disadvantages this population in relation to those that do attend preschool and achieve a head start in basic learning. Several countries are developing policies to extend the reach of pre-schooling and provide public finance to support its development (e.g. Ghana and South Africa).

Political, social, cultural and institutional conditions exist alongside economic realities. Together they frame the interaction of educational supply and demand at the individual, household, community and system level within each of the seven zones. These factors are widely overlooked in relation to EFA policy and planning. They include, *inter alia,* livelihood conditions (e.g. Buchman and Brakewood 2000), political climates (Little 1999), institutional arrangements (e.g. Birdsall et al. 2005), cultural and religious affiliations (Daun 2000) and gender issues (Colclough et al 2003). Almost every EFA/MDG report calls for enhanced political leadership and commitment to the goals of EFA/MDG. However, we know little about the conditions under which politicians see it as in their interests to support EFA and go beyond the rhetoric of expanding basic education to act to improve access for the poor and disadvantaged.

It is possible to profile participation in SSA in terms of different patterns of access. These generate starting points for progress towards EFA and the education MDGs. SSA countries fall into five broad groups in terms of existing patterns of access. There are those with –

1. high participation in primary and secondary, with low rates of repetition and drop-out;
2. very high initial enrolment rates in primary but high drop-out and repetition with low completion rates, and falling transition rates into secondary and low participation at secondary;
3. high primary entry rates and mid-levels of repetition, drop-out and completion, with mid-range secondary participation;
4. primary entry rates below universal levels, and low primary and secondary enrolment

rates; and

5. very low primary entry rates and very low participation at primary and secondary school.

These patterns are illustrated in Figure 2, showing how participation falls by grade for each group of countries. The patterns vary greatly and create different starting points for investment. Where the participation index (the number enrolled/the number in the age group for the grade) is around 100% through to grade 9, then most are already enrolled through primary and into lower secondary (type 1). In type 2 initial entry is much greater than the number of children of grade 1 age. However, participation rapidly falls off so that by grade 6 enrolments are only about 20% of the age group. Type 3 countries have fewer over-age pupils in grade 1 and manage to retain more of them through to grade 9 than is the case for type 2. Type 4 and 5 systems fail to enrol many children in grade 1 and have low and very low participation rates at grade 9. Countries with patterns 4 and 5 may come to resemble pattern 2 if UPE programmes are introduced rapidly. However, ideally future expansion will not create the exaggerated patterns of Type 2 whereby massive over-enrolment in grade 1 is accompanied by high drop-out and little improvement in secondary participation rates. If it does, then the difficulties associated with falling transition rates into secondary will be exacerbated.

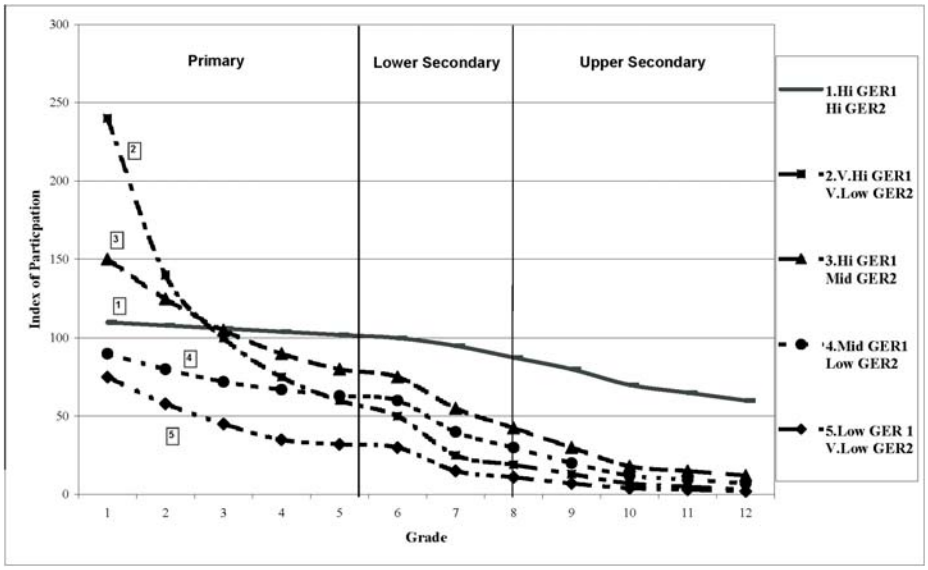


Figure 2: Generic chart of enrolment patterns
(Source: Lewin 2006c)

These patterns suggest different policy priorities for countries in different groups. Some indication of possible options is provided in Figure 3.

In summary, it is necessary to reconceptualize access and equity issues to understand –

- the different participation patterns that shape policies aimed at universalizing access; this includes consideration of the interactions between primary and secondary expansion, especially as they relate to teacher supply and transition rates;

Figure 3: Typology of challenges for the expansion of primary and secondary schooling in SSA

	Description	Countries	Prognosis
1	High GER1, high GER2L and GER2U, low attrition	Seychelles, South Africa, Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Swaziland	High participation rates at all levels and low population growth. Mostly higher income. Secondary expansion needed is modest and likely to be well within domestic resources.
2	Very high GER1, very low GER2L and GER2U, high attrition	Uganda, Rwanda, Malawi, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania	High GER1, but high attrition through primary grades. Transition rates likely to fall as large numbers of primary entrants flow through to the last grade of primary. Very high rates of secondary expansion needed to maintain transition rates. Financing of secondary expansion problematic, even with reforms. More investment in primary quality, reduced repetition and higher completion needed.
3	High GER1, mid-range GER2L and GER2U, mid-range attrition	Togo, Lesotho, São Tomé and Príncipe, Nigeria, Benin, Cameroon	High GER 1 with mid-range attrition through primary. Difficult to maintain transition rates if primary completion rates increase. Secondary expansion needed to enrol more than 50% through lower secondary. Financing of secondary expansion feasible, but requires reforms.
4	Mid-range GER1, low GER2L and GER2U, mid-range attrition	Gambia, Zambia, Kenya, Comoros, Congo, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire	GER1 below 100 with substantial numbers not enrolling or completing primary. Mid-range attrition reflects low initial enrolment, high repetition and drop-out. Transition rates mid-range but participation in secondary low. Substantial expansion needed to reach 50% in lower secondary. Financing of secondary expansion challenging, and in competition with need for more investment to increase GER1. Strategic focus needed.
5	Low GER1, very low GER2L and GER2U, mid-range attrition	Guinea, Tanzania, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Senegal, Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Burundi, Chad, Burkina Faso, Niger	Low GER 1 with most not completing primary. Mid-range attrition reflects low entry rates, high repetition and drop-out. Transition rates mid-range but participation in secondary very low. Massive expansion needed to reach 50% GER in lower secondary. Priority likely to be to finance increased primary participation in advance of modest rates of strategically focused expansion at secondary.

- the characteristics of those in the different zones of exclusion, particularly the fact that the majority who are not enrolled have attended, but dropped out;
- the significance for EFA of attendance and 'silent exclusion';
- the balance between supply-side and demand-side constraints;

- the political economy of EFA;
- the extent of exclusion related to household income;
- the degree to which gendered exclusion is related to structural factors, the extent of participation at different grade levels, and differential entry ages and rates of drop-out;
- the need to link conceptualizations to sustainable financial frameworks for resource allocation.

Targets and indicative benchmarks – panacea or problem?

Some of the issues surrounding targets set for EFA and the MDGs have been discussed above. Their use has generated various indicative frameworks and benchmarks that are in general use in relation to external assistance. The reasons are easily understandable. Clarity is needed regarding objectives, external assistance needs to be justified against measurable outcomes and recipients of assistance need to be specific about what they are agreeing to achieve with the support they receive.

Inevitably the idea is simpler than its execution. Table 1 lists a small number of the most common currently used benchmarks: in some planning processes the number exceeds 50 indicators.

Several issues arise that are discussed further in Lewin (2005).

First, these benchmarks do not constitute a single list. Different development partners stress different elements and the list of common targets has changed over the last ten years. Thus there may be an element of 'pick and mix' when it comes to applying targets to different systems. This is helpful if it reflects varying contexts; it may be confusing if the basis for choice is arbitrary. Identifying desirable pupil:teacher ratios, class size, teachers' salaries as a percentage of GDP, the proportion of private sector provision and other factors acquire very different meanings in different systems, since starting points are so different and prospects for the achievement of goals so varied.

Second, the types of benchmark and their derivation varies. Sometimes they are absolute outcomes, as with 100% enrolled in primary. In other cases they reflect what is judged to be best practice, as in a 40:1 pupil/teacher ratio at primary level. In yet other cases they may be based on abstract analysis of, for example, finance and unit costs leading to advocacy of particular target levels, such as primary teachers' salaries at 3,5 times GDP per capita. Other possibilities include best case comparison, such as level of achievement in cross-country comparisons, proportional progress (halving the illiteracy rate) and statistical redistribution (equity gains reflected in the distribution of participation by household income). Which types of targets are identified and on what basis clearly has implications for the extent to which they may be understood, accepted and acted on. It may also shape which groups' interests may be threatened, and which supported, when decisions are made on resource allocation.

Third, there are often alternative ways of measuring performance, such as 100% completion

Table 1: Indicative benchmarks from various sources

Benchmark	Indicative indicator at primary level	Comment
Service delivery		
Average annual teacher's salary (as multiple of GDP per capita)	3,5	Derived from an average of higher-enrolment countries
Unit cost per pupil as a % of GDP per capita	15%	Level necessary to afford universal enrolment
Pupil:teacher ratio	40:1	Based on pedagogic assumptions and affordability
Spending on inputs other than teachers (as a % of recurrent expenditure at the same level)	33%	Normative estimate
Average repetition rate	10% or less	Desirable norm
Intake rate girls	100%	MDG/EFA commitment
Intake rate boys	100%	MDG/EFA commitment
Completion rate girls	100%	MDG/EFA commitment
Completion rate boys	100%	MDG/EFA commitment
Survival rate to grade 5	100%	
Primary/lower secondary transition rate	No fixed target	Assumed to rise
Gross enrolment rate %	100+%	MDG/EFA commitment
Net enrolment rate %	100%	MDG/EFA commitment
Gender parity index	1	MDG/EFA commitment
Annual instructional hours	850-1 000	Cross-national comparisons
Achievement levels in national assessments	No fixed target	Assumed to increase
Achievement levels in international monitoring assessments	No fixed target	Assumed to increase
System expansion		
Construction of a classroom (unit cost)	$6 500-12 600	Based on good-practice average values in different regions
New school construction costs per classroom as a multiple of normal classroom costs	4 or less	Normative expectation
System financing		
Government revenues as % of GDP	14/16/18	Staggered targets based on levels of per capita GDP

Education budget as % of government budget	20	Minimum necessary to sustain NER 100%
Education recurrent spending as % of government revenues	20	Assuming domestic financing covers costs
Primary education recurrent spending as % of total recurrent spending	42/64	For different primary cycle lengths from 5 to 8 years
Private enrolments as % of total	10% or less	Normative expectation
Development expenditure as a % of total education expenditure	No fixed target	Depends on demand for new classrooms, schools, equipment and learning materials

Sources: http://www.fasttrackinitiative.org/education/efafti/documents/FrameworkNOV04.pdf, Bruns, Mingat and Raktomalala (2003), and author estimates from planning documents

of primary schooling within the primary school age range, completion for children of any age born after a certain date, completion achieved through post-primary accreditation of those who drop out, completion defined by passing a primary school leaving certificate that has less than 100% pass, etc. Which method is applied clearly has implications for apparent success.

Fourth, there may be incentives to choose the most achievable definitions of standards and manipulate data to show they have been achieved. Government bureaucracies in some countries with centrally planned economies were well known for producing statistical returns claiming to meet production quotas that were artefacts of the reporting systems. If flows of external assistance depend on meeting targets, they may well appear to be met when they are not. Paradoxically, incentives may penalize the successful and reward the laggards. If the price of success is the withdrawal of subsidy and additional support to achieve the target, it may be more attractive to fall short. If the price of success is another more demanding target, the same is true. Falling short of the target, especially if the causes are lost in a fog of confused accountability, may be more attractive than success.

Fifth, if target-setters are far removed from the target-getters who have responsibility for their achievement, disjunctions may occur that lead to low levels of credibility, commitment and accountability. If chains of accountability are diffuse and spread across many organizations and organizational levels, they are unlikely to invite effective ownership. If target-setters have not had experience of target-getting, they may set unrealistic targets that lack credibility. Setting targets for levels of contribution to EFA by non-government providers is also problematic – private providers have no obvious incentive to respond to national targets.

Sixth, targets adopted by developing country governments may or may not coincide with public service agreements that development partners have with their sponsors, whether multi- or bilateral development agencies answerable to national governments or national or international NGOs with boards of directors. The scope for confusion is substantial, with many different stakeholders responsible in different ways for the achievement of targets.

Finally, targets often carry consequences for other necessary developments. More precisely, often not all desirable targets can be achieved simultaneously and there are likely to be trade-offs. Thus targets generated from wish lists are unlikely to be cumulatively feasible, and prioritization is necessary. Interactions between targets can be very direct, as when setting targets for secondary enrolment rates implies minimum primary/secondary transition rates and primary completion rates. They may also be less direct: gender balance at secondary level may be unlikely, for instance, without high levels of primary enrolment.

Some targets interact in a zero sum way. Financially, greater public investment in primary may have to be balanced by changed levels of subsidy at other levels. This is zero sum if the education budget is determined by the level of domestic resources available, since these are relatively fixed in the short term. Decisions have to be made whether to privilege the enrolment (or completion) of every primary school child over investment at higher levels. Financial sustainability is one necessary determinant of choice, but this has to be coupled with aspects of general development strategy (where is growth to come from and what role should educational investment play?) and political reality (universities for an elite may be more politically visible than primary schooling for the rural poor).

The last point can be illustrated from recent projections of the costs of achieving EFA/MDG enrolment targets (Lewin 2006c). A data set of SSA countries with GNP/capita less than $1 500 was used to generate estimates of the costs of reaching target enrolment levels. Table 2 shows the results. Scenario 0 uses average levels for enrolment rates and unit costs for SSA for 2002 and allocates 20% to higher education and other expenditure. Scenario 1 simulates achieving GER1 = 110%, GER2L = 60% and GER2U = 30% and scenario 2 GER1 = 110%, GER2L = 100% and GER2U = 50%, using existing average unit costs (primary 12%, lower secondary 30% and upper secondary 60% of GNP per capita). For scenarios 3 and 4 the model is re-run using lower unit costs (primary 12%, lower secondary 20% and upper secondary 40% of GNP per capita) and lower allocations to higher education and other costs (15%).

The results show that using average SSA values of the parameters for 2002, about 2% of GNP and 50% of the education budget are required for primary and a total of 3,9% of GNP. To move from there to higher enrolment rates that should achieve UPE (GER1 = 110%) would require about 2,3% of GNP for primary at existing cost levels. However, if higher post-primary enrolment rates are to be achieved, the total needed would increase from 3,9% of GNP to 6% or 8,6%, depending on the levels of secondary enrolment targeted. With cost saving and efficiency reforms that reduced costs, 4,8% and 6,3% would be required.

Only in scenario 3 does primary allocation remain close to the benchmark of 50% for primary. This would require dramatic reductions in average unit costs at secondary level, which may not be achievable. The other scenarios would see allocation to primary shrink relative to other levels, but would need considerable increases in total allocations to education. Thus the benchmark of 50% may have to be reconsidered in the light of the financial implications of expanded post-primary access and the specific contexts and priorities of different systems.

Table 2: Costs of achieving different enrolment targets at different unit costs

	%GNP needed	% allocated by level
GER1 = 85, GER2L = 30, GER2U = 15		**Scenario 0**
Primary	1,97%	50,1%
Lower Secondary	0,77%	19,6%
Upper Secondary	0,40%	10,3%
Other incl HE	0,79%	20,0%
Total	3,93%	100,0%
GER1 = 110, GER2L = 60, GER2U = 30		**Scenario 1**
Primary	2,30%	36,5%
Lower Secondary	1,50%	23,8%
Upper Secondary	1,20%	19,0%
Other incl HE	1,30%	20,6%
Total	6,30%	100,0%
GER1 = 110, GER2L = 100, GER2U = 50		**Scenario 2**
Primary	2,30%	26,7%
Lower Secondary	2,60%	30,2%
Upper Secondary	2,00%	23,3%
Other incl HE	1,70%	19,8%
Total	8,60%	100,0%
Baseline Enrolment Targets, Cost-Saving Reforms		
GER1 = 110, GER2L = 60, GER2U = 30		**Scenario 3**
Primary	2,30%	47,9%
Lower Secondary	1,00%	20,8%
Upper Secondary	0,80%	16,7%
Upper Secondary	0,70%	14,6%
Total	4,80%	100,0%
GER1 = 110, GER2L = 100, GER2U = 50		**Scenario 4**
Primary	36,5%	36,5%
Lower Secondary	1,70%	27,0%
Upper Secondary	1,30%	20,6%
Other incl HE	0,90%	14,3%
Total	6,30%	100,0%

In conclusion

This article has explored the current status of education in relation to the EFA goals and MDGs, reflected on issues raised by the specification of the goals, drawn attention to needs to link policy and practice to the theoretical debates on the role of education in development, and invited reconceptualization of access and equity issues drawing on the evidence base. It has argued that target setting and indicative benchmarks have a value but that they can also distort some aspects of the educational development process.

The thrust of this article is to reconsider how targets and benchmarks can be generated that are collectively owned through a process that embeds them in national policy debate, seeks to generate a consensus amongst key stakeholders and ownership by implementers, and derives from a relevant evidence base. To be useful, such targets and benchmarks need to be feasible over defined time periods, discussed with those with experience of implementation, linked to other targets and tested for consistency, and presented in forms that can be understood by key stakeholders at different levels of the education system. They must also result in financially sustainable outcomes.

It may also be useful to consider the value of targets and benchmarks focused on rates of improvement and distributional measures. The former allows progress to be profiled at challenging but not unrealistic levels. The latter addresses a key need neglected in much planning, which is that aggregate measures conceal pockets of exclusion and outlying values for key parameters. Yet 'the last 20%' are often the ones who are experiencing educational provision defined by conditions a standard deviation or more from the mean. In many SSA systems both access and quality would be considerably improved by reducing the variance between those in the core of the system and those at its margins.

References

Aikman, S and el Haj, H. (2005) Mobile multigrade schooling as a pragmatic response to EFA for pastoralist peoples. In Little, AW(ed.). *Education For All: The Challenge of Multigrade Teaching*. Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Birdsall, N, Levine, R and Ibrahim, A. (2005) *Toward Universal Primary Education: Investments, Incentives and Institutions: Task Force on Achieving Universal Primary Education*. New York: United Nations Millennium Project.

Boyle, S, Brock, A, Mace, J and Sibbons, M. (2002) *Reaching the poor: The 'costs' of sending children to school: A six country study*. DFID Educational Papers No. 47. London: DFID.

Bruns, B, Mingat, A and Raktomalala, R. (2003) *A Chance for Every Child: Achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015*. Washington: World Bank.

Buchmann, C and Brakewood, D. (2000) Labor Structures and School Enrollments in Developing Societies: Thailand and Kenya Compared. *Comparative Education Review*, 44(2): 175-204.

Canagarajah, S and Nielsen, H. (1999) *Child labor and schooling in Africa: A comparative study*. Social Protection Discussion Paper Series No. 9916. Washington: World Bank.

Chowdhury, AMR, Nath, SR and Choudhury, RK. (2003) Equity gains in Bangladesh primary education. *International Review of Education*, 49(6): 601-619.

Colclough, C, Al-Samarrai, S, Rose, P and Tembon, M. (2003) *Achieving Schooling for All in Africa: Costs, Commitment and Gender*. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate.

Colclough, C with Lewin, KM. (1993) *Educating All the Children; Strategies for Primary Education in*

Developing Countries. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Daun, H. (2000) Primary education in sub-Saharan Africa – a moral issue, an economic matter, or both? *Comparative Education*, 36(1): 37-53.
Dunne, M and Leach, FE. (2005) *Gendered school experiences: The impact on retention and achievement in Botswana and Ghana*. DFID Educational Papers No. 54. London: DFID.
Fentiman, A, Hall, A and Bundy, D. (1999) School enrolment patterns in rural Ghana: A comparative study on the impact of location, gender, age and health on children's access to basic schooling. *Comparative Education*, 35(3): 331-349.
Kabeer, N, Nambissan, GB and Subrahmanian, R (eds). (2003) *Child Labour and the Right to Education in South Asia: Needs versus Rights?* New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, California and London: Sage Publications.
Laugharn, P. (2001) Negotiating 'education for many': Enrolment, dropout and persistence in the community schools of Kolondieba, Mali. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London.
Lewin, KM. (2005) Taking targets to task: Planning post primary education. *International Journal of Education and Development* 25(4): 408-422.
Lewin, KM. (2006a) The Limits to Growth of Non-Government Schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Walford, G and Srivastava, P. *Private Schools in Developing Countries*. Oxford: Symposium Books.
Lewin, KM. (2006b) Planning for secondary expansion in sub-Saharan Africa – key issues for sustainable growth in access. *Perspectives in Education* 24(2): 109-121.
Lewin, KM. (2006c) *Seeking Secondary Schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa: Strategies for Sustainable Financing*. Secondary Education in Africa (SEIA) (http://www.worldbank.org/afr/seia/) document. Washington DC: World Bank.
Lewin, KM. (2007) *Improving access, equity and transitions in education: Creating a research agenda*. CREATE Pathways to Access; Research Monograph No 1. University of Sussex: CREATE.
Lewin, KM and Caillods, F. (2001) *Financing Secondary Education in Developing Countries: Strategies for Sustainable Growth*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.
Lewin, KM and Sayed, Y. (2005) *Non-government secondary schooling in sub-Saharan Africa: Exploring the evidence in South Africa and Malawi*. DFID Educational Paper (in press).
Lewin, KM and Stuart, JS. (2003) *Researching Teacher Education: New Perspectives on Practice, Performance and Policy*. DFID Educational Papers, No. 49. London: DFID.
Little, AW (ed.). (2006) *Education For All and Multigrade Teaching: Challenges and Opportunities*. Dordrecht: Springer.
Little, AW. (1999) *Labouring to Learn: Towards a Political Economy of Plantations, People and Education in Sri Lanka*. London: Macmillan.
Mukudi, E. (2004) The effects of user-fee policy on attendance rates among Kenyan elementary school children. *International Review of Education*, 50(5-6): 447-461.
Nokes, C, Van de Bosch, C and Bundy, DAP. (1998) *The Effects of Iron Deficiency and Anemia on Mental and Motor Performance, Educational Achievement, and Behavior in Children: An Annotated Bibliography*. INACG document. Washington, DC: ILSI Press.
Pridmore, P, Yates, C, Kuhn, K and Xerinda, H. (2005) *The role of open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) in mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS on out-of-school youth in South Africa and Mozambique*. DFID Educational Papers (in press).
Ravallion, M and Wodon, Q. (1999) Does child labor displace schooling? Evidence on behavioural responses to an enrolment subsidy. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No 2116.
Rose, P and Al-Samarrai, S. (2001) Household constraints on schooling by gender: Empirical evidence from Ethiopia. *Comparative Education Review*, 45(1): 36-63.
UNESCO. (2000) *The Dakar Framework for Action. Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments*. Paris: UNESCO.
UNESCO. (2001) *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2002: Education for All - Is the world on track?* Paris: UNESCO.
UNESCO. (2003) *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4: Gender and Education for All - The Leap to Equality*. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2004) *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005: Education for All – The Quality Imperative.* Paris: UNESCO.
UNESCO. (2005) *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006: Education for All - Literacy for Life.* Paris: UNESCO.
United Nations (2000) The Millennium Development Goals. Website: http://www.un.org/millennium goals/

Notes on the author

Professor Keith M Lewin is a professor in international education and development and holds the position of director of the Centre for International Education at the University of Sussex.

Address for correspondence

k.m.lewin@sussex.ac.uk