

Foreword

There has been remarkable progress towards some of the EFA goals since the international community made its commitments in Dakar in 2000. Some of the world's poorest countries have demonstrated that political leadership and practical policies make a difference. It is evident that far more needs to be done to get all children into school through primary education and beyond. Whereas many Commonwealth member countries have put in place accelerated measures towards achieving the two education MDGs, they cannot neglect the need for approaches that will sustain UPE well beyond the target deadline of 2015.

Indicators have suggested that most of Anglophone Africa achieved nominal UPE through 100 per cent gross enrolment ratios at some point in the past thirty years, and that slowdown or regression has taken place since then. Mobilisation towards UPE is an enormous financial and political burden, especially for those countries whose education indicators are the weakest. The leap to UPE is greater, and in most cases there are major challenges in terms of structural capacity. Initial acceleration through rapid expansion of the education system can become fiscally unsustainable. Quality can be compromised, and in time the rate of expansion is slowed, leading to a fall in attendance as confidence in the system starts to wane. These preliminary evaluations must also be taken into account in terms of the enormous funding gap that currently exists globally. Quite simply, current donor pledges are not enough to meet the requirements of developing countries to attain UPE. Drives towards UPE must therefore plan accordingly if gains made over the next ten years are to have any meaningful impact through longevity.

This study is intended for use by the Secretariat in advocacy for the two education MDGs. Experiences of regression from nominal UPE in Commonwealth Africa have strong resonance for present and future policies. Understanding why apparent success in attaining UPE has withered can benefit countries by feeding into National Education Strategy Plans, and can also help to inform those countries seeking to make significant steps towards UPE through 'bold initiatives' like school fee abolition.

The study has identified, analysed and evaluated the causes behind UPE slowdown and apparent regression through a detailed study in the selected countries of Ghana, Kenya, Zambia, Nigeria and Tanzania. The study included not only a historical analysis of attainment and subsequent regression from UPE but also had a strong contemporary applicability. It encompassed a comprehensive evaluation of lessons learnt, current policy considerations and means of factoring into broader initiatives towards solid attainment of UPE by 2015.

The study concludes that the last 10 per cent of children still out of school will be the hardest to reach. Enrolments are low, for instance, among the pastoral Fulani and other nomads in Nigeria (estimated at some nine million people) and among the Masai in Tanzania, as well as the people of Kenya's North Eastern Province. In Zambia, the very scattered low-density rural population has less opportunity for education than easy-to-reach urban children. In contrast, in Tanzania, urban children may be left out because there are not enough schools to cope with the numbers.

The report highlights the plans and strategies for maintaining UPE as derived from lessons of the recent past which include among others; strong political will, enshrining free UPE in the constitution, competent education planners and good reliable data and proper analysis of the financial implications for this massive expansion. The following are given as strategies for success of UPE programmes; adoption of a broad Education agenda, nurturing partnerships in provision, ensuring appropriate teaching and learning environments and paying attention to quality teaching and learning.

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Dr. Henry Kaluba

Head and Advisor, Education

Social Transformations Programmes Division.