



## Florida High Schools Model United Nations

FHSMUN 35

### UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND

#### ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION BY 2015

**Author:** Brian D. Sutliff

**Abstract:** Education remains one of the primary responsibilities of most states and certainly for families and communities. When the member states of the UN articulated the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), they established universal primary education by 2015 as the second of those 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As 2015 approaches, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), families, teachers, and students must critically evaluate their individual and collective progress towards achieving universal primary education by 2015.

#### Introduction

One of the most fundamental obligations of any community is to educate its children. When that community is the international community at large, the obligations are clearly codified in the second of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): achieve universal primary education by 2015. For the world to truly leave no child behind, its citizens, leaders, and institutions must jointly acknowledge the necessity of eliminating existing barriers to education, especially for girls. As the delegates of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) discuss and debate the best ways to achieve universal primary education no later than 2015, they will need to frame their resolutions in the context of a synergistic multistakeholder dialogue amongst national governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society representatives, parents, teachers, and students.

#### Scale of the Problem

Considerable progress has been made in recent years, particularly between 1999-2004, in terms of bringing millions of new students into classrooms but according to United Nations statistics, 61 million primary education age<sup>1</sup> children were still not enrolled in school in 2010<sup>2</sup>. Of these 61 million children, approximately 53% were girls,

---

<sup>1</sup> Primary education typically consists of grades 1-5, with the student ages ranging from approximately 5-11.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals Report 2012* 2012 p. 17.

reflecting the gradual diminishing of gender biases throughout the world. While 89% of primary age children throughout the developing world were enrolled in 2010, only 76% of primary age children in sub-Saharan Africa were enrolled.<sup>3</sup> In the worst cases that were actually reported in 2009, Djibouti and Liberia, less than 40% of primary age children are currently enrolled in school; Somalia does not even report overall enrolment but reports male primary school attendance as being only 25% and female primary school enrolment a mere 21%.<sup>4</sup> These gaps, as well as those between urban children and rural children and between wealthy, middle-income, and poor children, act to delay and/or prevent sustained progress towards overcoming poverty, discrimination, and inequality. These disparities of opportunities afforded by the world's children become even more inexcusable when one considers that the amount of money projected to achieve universal primary education, approximately \$9 billion annually, equals less than one week of global military spending.<sup>5</sup>

### **Obstacles to Universal Primary Education**

The existing obstacles to universal primary education are considerable but the means to overcome those obstacles already exist. When analyzing the obstacles to universal primary education, four major areas are immediately apparent: 1)lack of schools, teachers, materials, and transportation for students; 2)discrimination against girls and other marginalized students; 3)enrollment fees for public education; and 4)schools that are unsafe and/or not “child-friendly.” Children who are internally displaced or refugees face additional obstacles, both legal and logistical. Iraqi refugee children in Jordan and Syria constitute a large and growing new school community within those countries and these refugee children face considerable obstacles to their education. In 2011, 28 million primary education age children were unable to attend school because of armed conflicts.<sup>6</sup> In these situations, it is absolutely essential that governments, UNICEF, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) establish schools and ensure that they are safe for the students and staff; UNICEF is working with the European Commission Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) to establish “bush schools” for hundreds of students in the remote northwest corner of the Central African Republic (CAR) to provide education for children who have had to flee violence and armed conflict.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> All statistics were taken from: United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2010* 2010 p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF, *State of the World's Children: Special Edition* 2009. Found at: [http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/sowc/pdfs/statistics/SOWC\\_Spec\\_Ed\\_CRC\\_TABLE%205.%20EDUCATION\\_EN\\_111309.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/sowc/pdfs/statistics/SOWC_Spec_Ed_CRC_TABLE%205.%20EDUCATION_EN_111309.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Statistics from Oxfam International.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), “EFA [Education for All] Global Monitoring Report” 2011. Found at: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/>

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Dickinson, “Providing education to conflict-affected children in the remote regions of Central African Republic” UNICEF December 31, 2009. Found at: [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/car\\_52286.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/car_52286.html)

## **Millions of Children Left Behind**

The progress made in enrolling tens of millions of children in schools around the world is encouraging but the statistics of 61 million primary age children still not enrolled in school are nonetheless quite sobering. In many parts of the world, there are simply not enough schools to adequately address the educational needs of the students. Even where schools exist, there are often very few teachers, many of whom are terribly underpaid, paid very irregularly, or not paid at all. The prevailing contemporary estimate is that sub-Saharan Africa needs to double its current teaching force to provide enough teachers to educate the additional 33 million children who are not currently enrolled in primary school.<sup>8</sup> Qualifications for teachers vary immensely and when a qualified teacher leaves the profession or moves to another area, it is frequently very difficult to find a well-qualified replacement teacher. Even though laudable progress has been made in bringing many first-time students to school, huge numbers of them drop out before completing the primary grades, often because their teachers are poorly qualified and cannot provide the high-quality education these children need. Far too many schools also lack needed materials including textbooks, paper, pens and pencils, any form of educational technology, or even bathrooms. Millions of children also face formidable physical obstacles. Making the necessary investments to provide free, high-quality public education to all primary age children is vital to ensuring that all children have the academic and life knowledge as well as skills needed to survive today.

Before examining each of these root causes more thoroughly, it is important to remember that there are millions of children who either attend private schools or are home-schooled by their parents or other caregivers. In many countries, these children do not appear on any state attendance or enrollment lists and this can inflate the numbers of children listed as not being in school. Many of these private schools and home-school initiatives provide high-quality education but there are critical concerns about how to ensure quality as well as how balanced the education provided is. Additionally, school enrollment figures and actual school attendance numbers vary widely. Children may still be counted as enrolled but actually attend school very infrequently; ensuring that those enrolled actually attend and complete their education is essential. UNICEF estimates that “in Eastern/Southern Africa, enrolment is as much as 13 percent higher than attendance.”<sup>9</sup> Inflating enrollment statistics without actually increasing attendance may be a quick and inexpensive way to theoretically meeting a state’s commitment to the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education by 2015 but it does very little to raise the level of human development within that state.

## **Some children don’t need to go to school**

While parents and teachers are all too familiar with the feigned illnesses and complaints of children who would prefer not to go to school on any given day, there are, tragically, tens of million of children who would like to go to school but are not allowed

---

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2012* 2010 p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF, “Progress for Children: A World Fit for Children Statistical Report” Number 6 December 2007 p. 16.

to attend. Girls comprise the largest group that faces direct discrimination when seeking education. Governments, both national and local, often spend more money on the education of boys than girls and many leaders, whether cultural, political, or religious, contend that the education of girls is either unnecessary or prohibited. While girls suffer the most obvious and well-documented discrimination when they try to attend school, they are by no means the only group of children who face such discrimination. Ethnic and religious minorities are often discouraged and/or prevented from going to school, many immigrant children face serious hurdles when attempting to attend school, and children who are physically and/or mentally disabled frequently cannot attend school. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 93 million children aged 14 and under experience “moderate or severe disability.”<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, many countries do not measure the educational attainment of students with disabilities but a recent WHO survey of 51 countries worldwide indicates that approximately 51% of boys with disabilities complete primary school and nearly 42% of girls with disabilities complete primary school.<sup>11</sup>

When conducting larger scale statistical analyses of global school attendance and enrollment data, three primary indicators stand out for the children who are not attending and/or enrolled in school: 1) they come from the lowest 20% of families as measured by annual income; 2) they live overwhelmingly in rural areas; and 3) the mothers have very little to no educational background.<sup>12</sup> According to the latest statistical “Progress for Children” report from UNICEF, the researchers concluded that “household wealth is the strongest determinant of school attendance in developing countries.”<sup>13</sup> While enrolling the children of these families will rarely immediately alleviate the poverty into which they were born, some governments have created new programs to provide families with direct financial incentives and assistance to encourage them to ensure regular school attendance for all of their children. In 1993, the government of Bangladesh introduced the “Food for Education” (FFE) program where poor children who attended school at least 85% of the time would receive foodgrain subsidies from the government. Xin Meng and Jim Ryan, researchers at the Australian National University, determined that the program was successful at increasing school attendance, achievement, and improving graduation rates for the recipients.<sup>14</sup> Children who are above the traditional age for their grade level, especially if they are more than 2 years older than the traditional age, often experience even greater difficulty completing their education. Worldwide, 17% of secondary age children attend primary school but in Eastern and Southern Africa, the total is 39% and in Western and Central Africa, it is 29%.<sup>15</sup> While many of these students may trace their difficulties to learning disabilities and/or behavioral issues, in far too many cases, these

---

<sup>10</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), “World Report on Disability” 2011 p. 36.

The entire report made be found at: <http://www.efareport.unesco.org>

<sup>11</sup> WHO, “World Report on Disability” 2011 p. 207.

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO, *Education for All Monitoring Report 2007* 2007 p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> UNICEF, “Progress for Children: A World Fit for Children Statistical Review” Number 6, December 2007 p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Xin Meng and Jim Ryan, “Evaluating the Food for Education Program in Bangladesh” August 6, 2003. Found at: <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/asarc/Meng-Ryan.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF, “Progress for Children: A World Fit for Children Statistical Review” Number 6 December 2007 p. 14.

students first enrolled in school at advanced ages for their grades and frequently find themselves falling behind their younger classmates.

### **Paying for access: enrollment fees for public schools**

Enrollment and uniform fees serve as considerable barriers to school attendance and enrollment in many developing countries. The well-known international charity, Save the Children, has consistently argued that eliminating school fees will significantly increase school attendance and enrollment, especially for girls in sub-Saharan Africa. Save the Children points to Uganda's success. Uganda eliminated school fees for primary school in 1997 and saw its total school attendance by girls double within 3 years.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, Uganda still charges considerable school fees at the secondary level and most students cannot afford them. Furthermore, school fees disproportionately tax the poorest citizens, many of whom are already poorly served by existing educational institutions. When families face significant financial barriers to educating their children, many children, especially girls, will effectively be denied the education they need to serve as productive citizens and workers.

As different countries eliminate school enrollment and uniform fees, they find that the massive increases in enrollment and attendance can at times overwhelm existing education infrastructures. When the government of Tanzania reintroduced free primary education in 2002, its enrollment figures surged. While the enrollment and attendance of these students is crucial, it is certainly just as crucial that each of them receive a high-quality education. At the Mivinjeni Primary School on the outskirts of Dar-es-Salaam, the student-to-teacher ratio soared to 46:1<sup>17</sup>, placing undue strains on the teachers, administrators, and increasing the already ever-present difficulties in providing all children with high-quality educations. Recruiting and training millions of qualified teachers must become, and remain, a priority for governments throughout the world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. As an example of cooperation between governments, Scotland and Malawi announced in October 2010 that Scotland would spend approximately £400,000 over 3 years to train and pay 1,000 women to become teachers in Malawi.<sup>18</sup> This Scottish-Malawi partnership builds upon the work of the Teacher Education in sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) program which currently sponsors projects in 9 African countries and has trained an estimated 400,000 teachers since its inception.<sup>19</sup> Ensuring that every child receives a high-quality education must be addressed, too, but it will be extremely difficult to ensure that if large numbers of children do not attend school.

---

<sup>16</sup> *BBC News*, "School fees 'barrier for girls'" September 5, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Milton Nkosi, "Tanzania looks beyond free schooling" *BBC News* July 15, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> *BBC News*, "Malawi teachers get funds boost" October 30, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Teacher Education in sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA). Found at: [http://www.tessafrica.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=119](http://www.tessafrica.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=119)

## **School isn't a good place to be**

The concept of school violence is, tragically, all too familiar throughout many parts of the world. A recent study of school violence in Togo revealed that “eight out of 10 children said they were regularly beaten at school,” presumably by teachers, and that “one girl in 25 said she had suffered sexual violence.”<sup>20</sup> Bullying by other students is all too common and has led to students withdrawing from or quitting school as well as seeking violent revenge. In early 2007, approximately 75% of British children aged 11-16 reported being bullied at school.<sup>21</sup> While stories of shootings and other violence in schools attracts far more news coverage than the overall quality of education and the treatment of students, the quality of the educational experience matters immensely. Schools that routinely mistreat their students, especially girls, ethnic and religious minorities, and students with disabilities, create learning environments that are not conducive to high levels of achievement and student progress. Students also are frequently injured and even killed in accidents that occur within schools that are not well-designed or constructed; in early December 2009, 8 Chinese students were killed when students were trampled trying to exit a school building using a narrow staircase.<sup>22</sup> Schools must also improve their capacities and facilities for promoting health. In many schools in rural and developing areas, restroom facilities are often inadequate, unsanitary, or even nonexistent.<sup>23</sup> Around the world in 2009, schools faced serious health threats from pandemic diseases, particularly H1N1 or the swine flu, and these issues need to be addressed more comprehensively in order to ensure that all children enjoy the opportunity to learn in a safe and healthy environment. While school attendance and enrollment figures continue to climb worldwide, there are widespread concerns about a decline in educational quality and an increase in retention rates, overage students, and dropouts.

## **Rebuilding Schools after Disasters**

No country is entirely safe from natural disasters. Earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and tsunamis have forced hundreds of thousands of children from their schools in recent years in such diverse locations as China, Iran, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Gulf Coast of the southern United States. UNICEF is actively engaged in rebuilding schools in Sri Lanka and striving to ensure that the schools are safe and “child-friendly.”<sup>24</sup> After the horrendous earthquake that struck Pakistan and Jammu-Kashmir in October 2005, governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) must build schools in a very different manner than the schools that were destroyed within a matter of minutes, if not seconds. Even though a number of schools reopened within weeks of the earthquake, large numbers of students, especially girls, stayed away from the schools because they

---

<sup>20</sup> *BBC News*, “Togo pupils ‘beaten by teachers’” April 10, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> *BBC News*, “Violence ‘a problem for children’” May 21, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Sharon LaFraniere, “China Stampede Kills 8 Students” *New York Times* December 8, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> UNICEF, “Lack of safe water and sanitation in schools jeopardizes quality education” January 24, 2005. Found at: [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_24898.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_24898.html)

<sup>24</sup> Rob McBride, “New child-friendly schools provide stability five years after tsunami” UNICEF December 30, 2009. Found at: [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sri\\_lanka\\_52280.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sri_lanka_52280.html)



feared further damage and because the reopened schools were not significantly rebuilt.<sup>25</sup> The rebuilding of schools in New Orleans and throughout the Gulf Coast of the southern United States in the wake of Hurricane Katrina required contractors and related groups to emphasize safer construction and governments to claim that they would provide greater oversight and enforcement of relevant construction codes and laws.<sup>26</sup> UNICEF has also been very active in rebuilding schools in Port-au-Prince after the devastation caused by the January 2010 earthquake.

### **Bringing School to the Children**

While building brick and mortar schools is a vital component of any comprehensive solution to achieving universal primary education, there are vulnerable populations of children who may never enter a school building in their lifetimes. To provide the education that these children deserve and need, all educational stakeholders and civil society partners must send teachers, instructional materials, educational technology, and related elements of education to where these children may be found, whether those environments are geographically remote, are refugee and/or internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, or serve migratory or nomadic populations. In Sudan, UNICEF reports that “there are more than 200,000 nomadic children enrolled in some 1,500 government nomadic schools in almost every state in Sudan.”<sup>27</sup> The progress that Sudan and its nomadic students have achieved over the past 15 years must be continued and expanded as there are undoubtedly still thousands of nomadic children in Sudan who have either never begun their education or seen it disrupted by war. Complementing this picture of nomadic children being educated in Sudan is the emergent need for education in the new country of South Sudan. Amidst the jubilation and lofty rhetoric that accompanied the recent independence ceremonies in Juba lie the harsh realities that South Sudan is a highly impoverished country with some of the lowest rates of adult female literacy and school attendance in the world; UNICEF estimates that approximately 1.3 million primary school age children are not currently enrolled in school in South Sudan and that only 8% of women can read and write.<sup>28</sup> With the intensification of fighting near the borders of Sudan and South Sudan and the attendant displacement of tens of thousands of civilians, the educational problems faced by thousands of South Sudanese will remain unresolved unless all relevant stakeholders cooperate to send teachers and materials to the areas that are most critically underserved.

---

<sup>25</sup> Greg Mortenson, *Stones into Schools: Promoting Peace With Books, Not Bombs, in Afghanistan and Pakistan* Viking 2009 p. 205.

<sup>26</sup> Sarah Carr, “School construction oversight panel is an unfulfilled promise” *New Orleans Metro Education News* September 30, 2009. Found at: [http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2009/09/post\\_7.html](http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2009/09/post_7.html)

<sup>27</sup> Abdel Rahman El Dood, “Mobile schools provide primary education in Sudan’s nomadic communities” July 21, 2011. Found at: [http://www.unicef.org/mdg/sudan\\_59297.html](http://www.unicef.org/mdg/sudan_59297.html)

<sup>28</sup> Rudina Vojvoda, “Beyond School Books’ – a podcast series on education in emergencies” Podcast #42 July 6, 2011. Found at: [http://www.unicef.org/mdg/sudan\\_59092.html](http://www.unicef.org/mdg/sudan_59092.html)

## Creating an Effective Multistakeholder Dialogue on Universal Primary Education

The international community is actively promoting sustained partnerships between the appropriate and interested entities for any given issue. As with most other issues, national governments need to take the lead with respect to the education of their citizens. National governments must emphasize the importance of increasing their own direct investments into the education of their citizens, rather than funneling money for education into the military. British journalist Christina Lamb noted that Pakistan's low literacy rates were "the result of spending only two percent of the gross national product on education – one of the lowest levels in the world – compared to thirty percent on defence."<sup>29</sup> National governments have the institutional and legal authority necessary to ensure universal primary education for all of their citizens but many need to develop a more effective and far-reaching educational infrastructure to meet this laudable of educating all children. When national governments work effectively with other countries, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGO's), and civil society partners, they can improve and expand the educational opportunities for their populations. This effective and efficient use of capital must be replicated many times over to produce the positive impacts that are so urgently needed around the world.

Building schools is absolutely essential to providing educational opportunities but the various stakeholders in this multilateral dialogue on universal primary education must also seek to develop ways to acquire more educational materials, incorporate appropriate technologies, and hire more, well-qualified teachers to provide students with the high-quality education that they deserve. In 2005, newly inaugurated President Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi announced that he would abolish school fees for Burundi's children. This laudable step has increased school enrollment to an estimated 99% in 2008<sup>30</sup> and attendance tremendously in Burundi but now schools find themselves, as in Tanzania and many other countries, vastly overcrowded. For 1320 students, the school has only eight unisex latrines, classes sometimes have 80 students apiece, and there are nowhere near enough textbooks for the students. UNICEF, in conjunction with local parents and international donors, has donated large amounts of teaching materials and improved the sanitation and latrines for the school but much more needs to be done to ensure that all students enjoy the high-quality education that they deserve.<sup>31</sup>

The UN System has implemented a new program for achieving gender parity in primary education called the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). UNGEI was established at the Third Education for All Conference in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000 and its lead UN agency is UNICEF. UNGEI's effectiveness is dramatically enhanced through its partnerships, including its Global Advisory Committee; these partnerships include: UNESCO, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Bank Group's donor agencies, and a growing number of NGO's. To improve the overall

---

<sup>29</sup> Christina Lamb, *The Sewing Circles of Heart: A Personal Voyage Through Afghanistan* Perennial New York 2004 p. 98.

<sup>30</sup> United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2010* 2010 p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> Patricia Lone, "In Burundi, the promise of universal primary education struggles with limited resources" February 6, 2006. Found at: [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/burundi\\_30935.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/burundi_30935.html)



educational prospects for girls throughout the developing world, UNICEF is partnering with national governments and community organizations and providing equipment, supplies, teacher training and assistance to community partners, such as in the new “warehouse school” in Moribaya, Guinea, about 30 miles outside of the capital, Conakry.<sup>32</sup>

As NGOs stake out an increasingly crucial role in ensuring that all children have access to high-quality education, they must provide not only building materials but also, at times, teachers. The NGO Teachers Without Borders operates Community and Teaching Learning Centers (CTLCs) in over 12 countries throughout the world, using “existing facilities and are often outfitted with libraries (such as dictionaries, references, educational material of general interest) and computers, face-to-face classrooms, and break-out spaces, used primarily to serve several essential functions for community sustainability.”<sup>33</sup> By focusing on teacher training and community educational development, Teachers Without Borders and related NGOs are able to incorporate community concerns into their educational mission; they also provide important volunteering opportunities for teachers to work in other countries.

## **Conclusion**

Enrolling tens of millions of primary age children in school is a lofty yet necessary goal. Without an education, children frequently lack the necessary knowledge and skills for full citizenship, gainful employment, and even for their own, as well as their children’s, health. As the countries and related actors of the international community devise solutions to the problems posed by 61 million primary age children not enrolled in school, they must always bear in mind that the education that these children receive needs to be of the highest quality.

## **Guiding Questions:**

What is the current situation like in your country in terms of primary school enrolment and attendance? Do girls attend schools as frequently as boys in your country? What types of financial and material incentives can governments or other non-state actors provide to increase enrolment and attendance?

What are the obstacles to universal primary school enrolment and attendance that children continue to experience? What changes can governments make to existing laws to increase primary school enrolment and attendance? What steps do governments need to take to increase funding for education, particularly in the world’s Least Developed Countries (LDCs)?

---

<sup>32</sup> Michele Alan Badarou, “UNICEF and partners support local community schools for Guinean girls and boys” October 29, 2007. Found at: [http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/guinea\\_1590.html](http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/guinea_1590.html)

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.teacherswithoutborders.org/html/ctlc.html>

What actions does UNICEF need to take to increase global primary school enrolment and attendance? How might governments assist UNICEF in promoting and achieving universal primary school enrolment and attendance within the next 5 years?

What actions can non-governmental organizations (NGOs), business leaders, and community groups take to build and/or support schools? How can governments, UNICEF, educators, NGOs, and building contractors ensure that schools are built safely and securely?

How much progress has been made worldwide towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of achieving universal primary education by 2015?