

# Education

72% vs 90%



*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.*

Nelson Mandela

## **Despite improvements...**

Education is one of the key instruments to reduce poverty and lay the foundations for sustained economic growth. Although access to education in Sub-Saharan African countries has improved, the youth literacy rate remains the lowest in the world: 72% compared to 90% in the Middle East and North Africa, or 97% in Latin America and the Caribbean.

## **72% of the world's illiterates are in Africa**

In 2008, nearly 796 million adults (17% of the adult population worldwide) could neither read nor write. Approximately two thirds were women. A large majority of illiterates live in Sub-Saharan Africa. 10 countries account for 72% of adult illiterates in the world. According to the "2011 Monitoring for All Global Education" report from UNESCO, in the last ten years significant advances have been seen in education. However, there is a fear that it is slowing up. In any case, even today 43% of children with no access to schooling live in Sub-Saharan Africa.

**Education is a fundamental human right and is crucial for the development of individuals and societies.**

By extending education and improving its quality, people have more chances in life. This has a variety of positive effects in social, family and community terms, especially for girls and women. In regions with significant challenges such as Sub-Saharan Africa, education is a fundamental safeguard for the future.

In 1990, the World Conference on Education for All was held in Jomtien, Thailand. It led to the international initiative EFA (Education For All), headed by UNESCO. In 2000, the international community met again at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal. Through the Dakar Framework for Action, it defined six goals for 2015 to achieve substantial improvements in education for children and adults, paying special attention to promoting gender equality in access to quality education.

In 2000, the 189 member countries of the UN also established the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** with the same deadline of 2015. The objectives set in Dakar help to achieve the MDGs, especially **Goal 2, which is to achieve universal primary education**, and Goal 3, which focuses on eliminating gender disparity in education at all levels.

To speed up progress in meeting the EFA goals, the FTI (Fast Track Initiative) was launched in 2002, renamed the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in September 2011. Out of the 58 developing countries supported by this partnership, 38 are in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The **African Union** is currently implementing the "**Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education**" (2006-2015), which states that "education is an important area whose results directly affect and determine the quality and extent of development in Africa."

As in any geographical area, history is crucial to understand the current state of education in Sub-Saharan Africa, inherited from the colonial and independence period. In the nineties, the **Structural Adjustment Programmes** imposed by international financial institutions involved **substantial cutbacks in basic social services, which had a negative impact on education**.

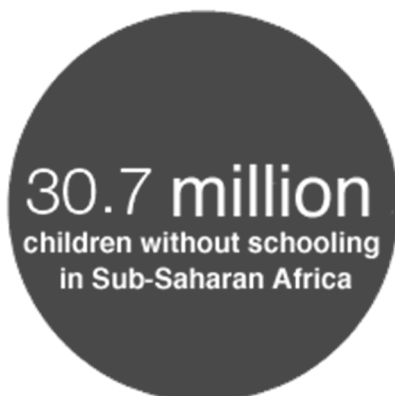
### **Major advances in education in the last decade,**

according to UNESCO data, nevertheless show the importance of keeping up spending on education in order to improve its quality and scope. There is some encouraging data in this vein:

- On average, Sub-Saharan African countries spend **22.4% of public expenditure** on education.

- The ratio in **primary education is 70%**, although there are significant disparities depending on the country and region.
- Significant progress has been made in gender equality in primary education, reaching **parity in 9 countries and ratios above 90% in many of them.**
- **Literacy** is one of the areas where most progress has been made among both youths and adults, with literacy rates of 78% and 67.3% respectively. Although the lowest ratios are found in rural areas, particularly among women (according to UNESCO, they account for 62% of all illiterate adults), it should be pointed out that women's literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa is growing at a rate of 3.8% among adults, and even faster among young people.

Currently, half of the world's children without schooling live in Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition to primary education, the **challenges** in education are very significant in secondary and higher education. There are only places for 36% of adolescents to attend secondary school, and girls are the most affected: the gross enrolment rate for girls in middle school (early secondary school) is 39%, whereas for boys it is 48%. An increase in the number of teachers (UNESCO considers it necessary to recruit more than 2 million new teachers to achieve the goal of universal primary education) and the quality of the teaching staff are essential matters.



In Sub-Saharan Africa, **30.7 million children** go without schooling (21.5% of the world total; 22.4% for girls and 20.6% for boys). Of these children, 62% live in **rural areas**. On a regional level, in the countries of the Southern African Community this rate falls to 7.7%, while in the West African region it rises to 35.4% (where it is estimated that 17 million children have no schooling). Although in recent years the **enrolment rate has doubled in secondary education**, Sub-Saharan Africa continues to have the **lowest rate in the world**, at 40% in 2010.

As for **gender equality in primary school**, despite the progress made on the continent as a whole, some countries still present a major challenge, particularly in Central Africa but also in countries such as Guinea, Ivory Coast, Angola and Eritrea. The obstacles include social

conservatism, the absence of women in decision-making bodies, and the lack or low quality of data on gender.

**Conflicts** have also had a devastating impact on education, leading to millions of children having no access to their right to education. The UNHCR estimates that in 2011 there were 3 million refugees in Africa and almost 7 million internally displaced people. Education in emergencies is essential in many countries and regions of Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite the progress made, many more resources are needed. South Sudan, which gained independence in 2011 after decades of conflict with its northern neighbour, has some of the lowest education ratios in the world.

Proper management of revenues from the exploitation of natural resources is crucial in many sub-Saharan countries, as evidenced by the case of Botswana, which has achieved universal primary education and a rate of 82% in secondary education.

The year 2015 is a crucial one for the international development agenda, particularly for advances in education. While a lot remains to be done, and it is not expected that all the goals in the Dakar Framework for Action or the **Millennium Development Goals** will be achieved, there are some cases that show it is possible to achieve development in education. **The Seychelles stands out as a country that has already achieved** the aims set for 2015, and **it is very likely that they will be achieved in another twelve countries** (Botswana, Cape Verde, Gabon, Ghana, Mauritius, Namibia, São Tomé and Príncipe, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zambia).

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