

# *Policy Brief*

## **What Does History Teach Us in Achieving UPE and UPC for Education for All 2015?\***

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### **BACKGROUND**

As we speak about the challenges still ahead to reaching Education for All (EFA) by 2015, it is easy to forget that considerable progress has been made. Despite 77 million children of primary school age still not being in school in 2004, nearly 90 million children entered school during the 1990s. Although 60% of the children not in school are girls, the gender gap in primary education is closing, with the ratio of girls' to boys' enrollment rising from 88% in 1990 to 94% in 2000.

The EPDC report *Educating the World's Children* explores the progress that has been made in the past 50 years in 70 developing countries, mostly low-income and IDA eligible. (It also presents future trends not discussed in this brief.) Awareness of the historical trends of education growth contributes to a better understanding of the progress to achieving the EFA. Education trends in these 70 developing countries show persistent growth in the number of children being educated from 1950 to 2000, despite temporary setbacks such as socio-political upheavals and war. On the other hand, education growth rates differ widely across and within countries, the schooling gaps between school entry and completion are large in some countries, and reaching the last ten percent of often marginalized children in any country is particularly difficult.

### **DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

*Educating the World's Children* estimates the 50-year trends of primary school entry and primary school completion by taking the age-pattern of education attainment from household surveys. Most people enter primary, finish primary, and enter secondary within reasonably well-defined age intervals. For example, most primary school entry occurs between the ages of 6 and 10 (in some countries up to age 14). Because of this, one can use the educational attainment of each age group to approximate the schooling patterns when that age group was of the age to be entering primary or completing primary. Thus, educational attainment for the current population from ages 15 to 65 provides a time series of schooling trends for 50 years. Most of the data for this report are from household surveys and population censuses from 1999 and later, principally from USAID-sponsored Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and UNICEF-sponsored Multiple Indicators Cluster Surveys (MICS).

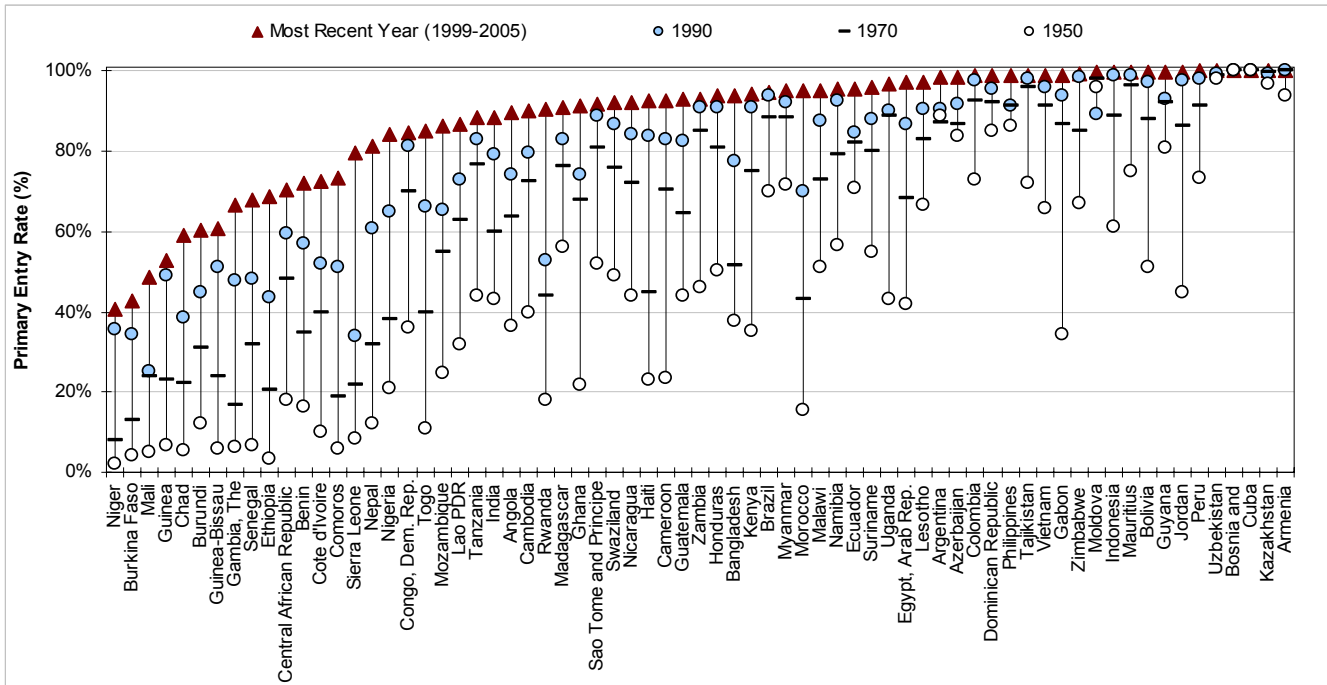
### **FINDING #1. EDUCATION GROWS**

Figure 1 shows the primary school **entry** rates in 70 countries in 1950, 1970, 1990, and the most recent year available, and Figure 2 shows the primary school **completion** rates. More than anything else, these graphs show strikingly the consistency of education increases throughout the developing world: virtually all of the primary entry rates increase from period to period. For half a century, the historical trend has been

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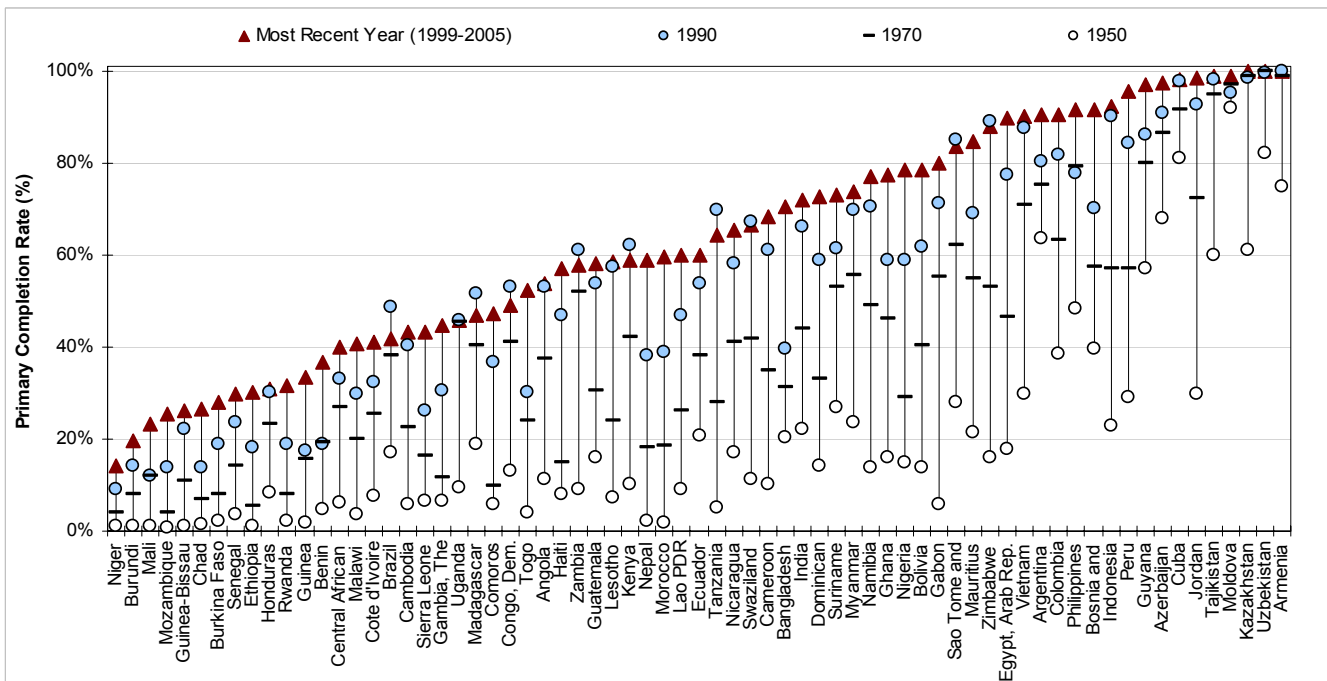
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FIGURE 1. HISTORICAL TRENDS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL ENTRY RATES, 1950-2005



\*Note: This graph is placed in a descending order (left to right) based on the growth rate of primary entry rates from 1950 to 2005.

FIGURE 2. HISTORICAL TRENDS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES, 1950-2005



\*Note: This graph is placed in a descending order (left to right) based on the growth rate of primary completion rates from 1950 to 2005.

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in the direction of universal primary entry and completion in all 70 countries studied. There are a few countries with periods of stagnation, such as Ghana, Guinea, Cambodia, Angola, Lao PDR, and Sierra Leone, but no country has experienced a sustained decline. Some of the fastest growth in primary **entry** has been in Morocco (15% primary entry around 1950 to 95% in the most recent year), Togo (11 to 85%), Rwanda (18 to 90%), and Sierra Leone (8 to 80%), all countries in Africa. The fastest growth in primary **completion** has been in Gabon (6% primary completion around 1950 to 80% in 2000), Egypt (18 to 90%), Zimbabwe (16 to 88%), Indonesia (23 to 92%), and Jordan (30 to 98%).

## **FINDING #2. GROWING EDUCATION TAKES TIME**

All countries that have not already completed universal primary entry and completion are on a growth path of longer than 50 years from beginning levels of primary entry and completion (say below 10%) to final levels, say above 90%. Extremely high growth rates are historically not sustained over a longer period and growth rates (nearly) uniformly decline as primary entry and completion increase. The highest 50-year average annual growth rates from 1950 to the most recent year of data available are 6-7% annually, but only for countries that started in 1950 at single-digit levels. The highest 15-year average annual growth rates from 1990 to the most recent year of data available are 7-12%, also only for countries starting at extremely low levels.

## **FINDING #3. GROWTH RATES DIFFER BY LARGE MARGIN**

Education in some countries is moving towards universal primary entry and completion faster than in others. The differential distances between the markers for two historical years show discrepancies in the speed of education growth across countries. Countries that had similar primary entry or primary completion

rates in the most recent year often started from very different levels in 1950. For example, Argentina and Vietnam both have 90% primary completing rates in the most recent years, but Argentina started with 64% primary completing around 1950, compared to 30% primary completing for Vietnam – Vietnam's education grew faster. A similar comparison can be made between Morocco and Benin. Around 1950, both countries had similar primary entry rates of 15%, but Morocco's education grew faster, so in 2003 Morocco's entry rates were 95%, compared to only 72% in Benin.

## **FINDING #4. REACHING THE LAST CHILDREN IS MORE DIFFICULT**

The figures show that once a country has reached about 90% primary entry or completion, progress slows down, as marked by the closer positioning of the historical year markers. For example, Kenya moved from 35% primary entry in 1950 to 91% in 1990, but then added only 3 percentage points between 1990 and 2003. In Jordan, primary completed proportions increased from 30% in 1950 to 93% in 1990, but only to 98% in the next 11 years. The challenge is in reaching the last ten percent of children and keeping them in school.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **RECOMMENDATION #1**

All of the above findings have implications for policy. The historical trend of education growth paths towards universal primary entry and completion taking at least 50 years, but often more, means that if countries that are the furthest away from achieving universal primary education are to come close to reaching the EFA goals by 2015, *new approaches are needed that depart from the historical manner of creating education growth.*

### **RECOMMENDATION #2**

As the historic pattern is for countries to take 50 years

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and more to reach UPE and UPC, *the donor community must plan to provide long-term support to countries in need.*

## **RECOMMENDATION #3**

The historical trends also identify some countries that have made the most rapid and sustained progress. *We should study successful countries for lessons about how to create long-term education system growth: Indonesia, Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, Togo, Zimbabwe (before the present decline set in), and Sierra Leone (rapid recovery after years of war).*

## **RECOMMENDATION #4**

Finally the trends here show that reaching the last 10% of children is slower than reaching the first 90%. Other research shows that these children are generally children in rural areas, in particular states or provinces, girls, and the poor. *Underserved groups should be identified and targeted with additional resources.*

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\* This policy brief is adapted by HyeJin Kim from: Wils, Annabette, Bidemi Carrol, and Karima Barrow. *Educating the World's Children: Patterns of Growth and Inequality* (Washington, DC: Education Policy and Data Center, 2005) [<http://epdc.org/static/EducatingTheWorldsChildren.pdf>].