

Chapter 1: Evaluation Highlights

- The World Bank has committed approximately \$14 billion for primary education since 1963.
- Primary education contributes to poverty reduction primarily by improving basic knowledge and skills.
- Basic knowledge and skill levels, even among school graduates, have often been very low in developing countries.
- Bank policy objectives for primary education have emphasized universal access and improved learning outcomes.
- The education Millennium Development Goals and the Fast-Track Initiative emphasize primary school completion, not learning outcomes.



Introduction

Primary education is a powerful lever for poverty alleviation and social and economic growth (World Bank 2002b). Its results can be empowering, enabling graduates to take charge of their lives and make more informed choices, contribute to the building of a democratic polity, increase earning potential and social mobility, improve personal and family health and nutrition (particularly for females), and enable women to control their fertility.¹

Advancing Primary Education: A Worldwide Goal

World Bank studies in the early 1980s showed relatively high rates of return to investments in primary education (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall 1985). More recent research shows that it is the knowledge and skills acquired during primary education rather than the number of years of schooling completed that make a difference in personal economic mobility (Glewwe 2002) and national economic growth (Coulombe, Tremblay, and Marchand 2004; Hanushek and Kimko 2000).² Thus, to the extent that public investments in primary education are effective in conveying these learning outcomes, support for primary education is central to the World Bank's mandate of poverty reduction.

Developing countries, the World Bank, and the international community have invested heavily in primary education over the past few decades. Since 1963, when it began lending for education, through mid-2005, the World Bank

alone has committed about \$14 billion for support to primary education in more than 100 low- and middle-income countries (box 1.1).³ Primary enrollments grew rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s, but stagnation and setbacks in the 1980s were brought on by economic downturns, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (figure 1.1).

An estimated 103 million 6- to-11-year-olds in developing countries—or about one-fifth of the total—were still not in school in 2001 (UNESCO 2004). United Nations global monitors now predict that, at current trends, nearly 47 million children will still be out of school in 2015 (UNDP 2005).

About 80 percent of out-of-school children were in low-income countries in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, and 15 percent were in the Middle East and North Africa (World Bank 2002b). Within countries, access to primary

About a fifth of developing country children still lack access to primary education.

Box 1.1: How Much Has the World Bank Committed to Primary Education?

If all primary education projects were devoted completely to primary education, then calculating the World Bank's commitments would be straightforward. However, primary education is often part of a larger investment or sector adjustment activity that includes other education subsectors and improvements in management and administration. This makes it difficult to attribute them to any one level of schooling. Further, primary education can also be found as part of projects in other sectors, such as agriculture, community development, or HIV/AIDS, or incorporated in development policy lending (DPL) with objectives related to primary education, even though the budgetary support is not earmarked for specific sectors.

The evaluation used two internal databases to estimate primary education expenditure—one maintained by the Bank's Education Sector exclusively for projects originating in that sector, and a Bank-wide database that covers projects in all sectors, including education. Both databases attribute percentages of project spending to specific subsector codes, including primary education.^a

In recent years a "general education" code, which can include all types of education expenditures, has come into widespread use. The convention followed by Education Sector management, based on analysis of a subsample of projects with

the "general education" code, is to allocate half of general education expenditures to primary education. Many social fund and community-based or -driven projects also allocate funds for "other social services," and it is left to the communities to decide what will be financed.

It was not possible to calculate what share of these types of funds was ultimately used by communities to finance primary education inputs, but given the proliferation of this type of project (IEG 2005c) and the fact that basic education is often among communities' top priorities, primary education financing from this source could be substantial.

The Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) estimate of \$14 billion in Bank commitments to primary education since 1963 is based on data for projects originating in the Education Sector, on data for projects originating in other sectors, and the Education Sector's convention of allocating half of general education commitments to primary education.

For DPL, including Poverty Reduction Support Credits (PRSC), the database with all projects attributes a notional share of the total commitment for budgetary support to as many as five sectors, based on an assessment by the task team leader of the frequency of the sector's occurrence in the policy matrix.

education is unevenly distributed by gender, income, ethnicity, and disability and between rural and urban areas.

Two-thirds of out-of-school children were girls, a share almost unchanged from a decade before (Watkins 2001). Moreover, children from the richest 20 percent of households in developing countries are three times more likely to be in school than those from the poorest 20 percent (UNDP 2005).

Among children already enrolled in primary school, learning outcomes have often been low—in some cases disastrously low—reflecting widespread ineffectiveness in teaching and learning processes. National test data from Bangladesh, Brazil, Ghana, Pakistan, the Philip-

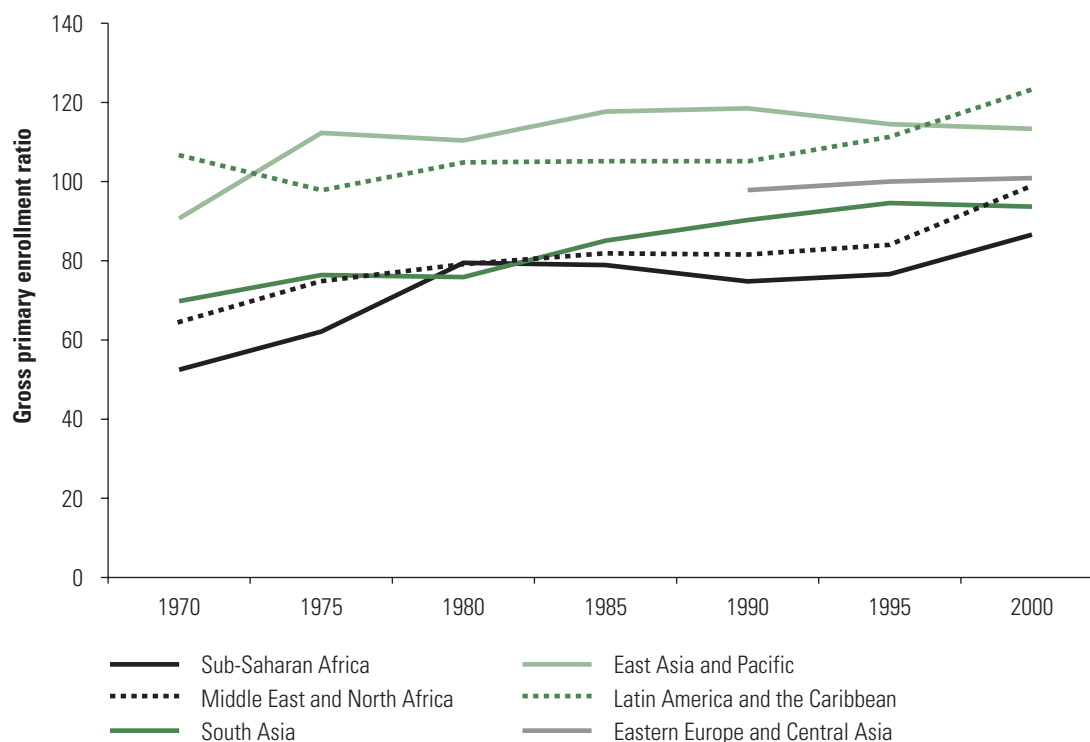
For those enrolled, low learning outcomes are widespread.

ppines, and Zambia all show a majority of those who leave primary school to be achieving well below their countries' minimum

performance standards, with results in many low-income, rural areas being "only marginally better than for children who have not completed school" (Watkins 2001, p. 105).⁴ Such results are echoed in the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's *EFA Global Monitoring Report*, aptly subtitled "The Quality Imperative" (UNESCO 2004).

The Evolution of World Bank Policy on Primary Education

The World Bank's commitment to universal primary education dates back to its 1980 *Education Sector Policy Paper*, which emphasized for the first time the relatively high rates of return to primary education (World Bank 1980).⁵ The Bank's 1990 policy paper, *Primary Education*, portrayed primary education as the foundation of a country's human capital development (World Bank 1990). It concluded with a challenge to developing countries and to itself:

Figure 1.1: Trends in Gross Primary Enrollment Ratios by Region, 1970–2000

Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook (1999) for 1970–95 for all Regions except Europe and Central Asia and World Development Indicators (World Bank 2004h) for that Region and the year 2000.

Note: The gross primary enrollment ratio (GER) is defined as the number of children enrolled in primary school as a percent of the primary school-age population. It can exceed 100 because of the enrollment of over-age children, due to late enrollment or repetition. The net primary enrollment ratio (NER), which is the number of children enrolled of primary school age as a percent of the primary school-age population, is always lower and cannot exceed 100. None of the Regions has achieved an NER of 100.

“adequate funding of a good-quality primary education system that is widely and equitably available is ... a critical priority for both national budgets and external aid.” The twin policy objectives of more equitable access and improved student learning set a pattern for all subsequent policy papers. It was this focus that the Bank took to the first Education for All (EFA) conference, held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, where nations and development agencies committed to “meeting basic learning needs” of children and adults.⁶ While the resulting World Declaration on Education for All committed to achieving universal primary education by the year 2000, it underscored that the ultimate objective of these efforts is learning:

Whether or not expanded educational opportunities will translate into meaningful development ... depends ultimately on

whether people actually learn as a result of those opportunities, i.e., whether they incorporate useful knowledge, reasoning ability, skills, and values. The focus of basic education must, therefore, be on actual learning acquisition and outcome, rather than exclusively upon enrollment, continued participation in organized programmes, and completion of certification requirements.⁷

Equitable access and improved learning were early Bank policy concerns.

In a 1995 review of *Priorities and Strategies for Education* (World Bank 1995), the Bank gave top priority to “basic” education, which included but was not limited to primary education, emphasizing sectorwide policy reform; equity of access for the disadvantaged (girls, the poor,

The second Education for All conference prioritized improved learning outcomes.

ethnic minorities, the disabled, and those in remote or hardship areas); and institutional development, including the capacity to measure learning outcomes (see box 1.2). A new *Education Sector Strategy Paper* in 1999 reaffirmed the commitment to basic education—especially for the poorest and for girls—and to systemic reform (World Bank 1999).

The education MDGs emphasize primary school completion, not learning outcomes.

Subsequently, the Bank supported the Dakar Framework for Action that was the result of a second EFA conference, the World Education Forum, held in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000 (UNESCO 2000). The Dakar Framework resulted in a renewed global commitment to primary education, not simply to improved access and quality of instruction, but to equitable achievement of learning outcomes. Specifically, it advocated:

- “Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities have ac-

cess to and complete free and compulsory education of good quality

- 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
- Improving all aspects of the quality of education so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills” (UNESCO 2000, p. 8)

In 2000 the Bank also endorsed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The goal for education overall was to ensure “that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary education,” plus a push for gender equity in access, and literacy for youth age 15–24. However, unlike both the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All and the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action, *the MDGs primarily address the issue of access to primary education and do not include an explicit goal with respect to either the quality of instruction or to learning outcomes, such as literacy or numeracy.*

In 2002, the World Bank and other regional, bilateral, and international development agencies established the Education for All–Fast-Track Initiative (FTI) as a means of accelerating progress toward the MDG of universal primary school completion by 2015 in low-income countries (World Bank 2004d).⁸ The FTI is a partnership between national governments and donors. Countries can qualify for FTI support by submitting a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) or the equivalent and a national education plan, both of which prioritize universal primary education.⁹ Countries are also expected to commit to monitorable policy, service delivery, and financing targets using “benchmarks” specified in the Indicative Framework (see Appendix E).¹⁰ In return, donors are expected to scale up technical and financial resource mobilization to support these country-driven programs and to harmonize their support.¹¹

Box 1.2: Primary, Basic, and General Education

For the purposes of this evaluation, *primary education* is defined as the “general school education at the first level [plus non-formal education at this level], programs designed to give skills in numeracy and literacy and to build the foundations for further learning.” Depending on the conventions in a country, this would include the first five to eight years of formal education. The term *basic education* includes primary instruction but can also cover a broader set of educational programs, including lower secondary education, early childhood education, adult literacy, and life-skills or nonacademic nonformal education programs. More recently, project designers inside and outside the Bank’s Education Sector have begun using the term *general education* to define the content of education projects, a term that is sometimes used interchangeably with primary education or to describe projects covering more than four subsectors of education.

The Bank's 2005 *Education Sector Strategy Update*, which incorporated some early findings from this evaluation, committed the Bank to maintaining momentum on EFA and the MDGs, while at the same time strengthening "education for the knowledge economy" (secondary, higher, and lifelong education; World Bank 2005b). The sector plans to work through the FTI to maintain momentum on EFA in the low-income countries. It strongly supports strengthening the results orientation of the sector (greater attention to education outcomes), suggesting that key education outcome indicators be included in all new Bank country-level planning documents (Country Assistance Strategies).

Over the 15-year period in which primary education has been a priority for the Bank, policy objectives have been remarkably stable and can be summed up as follows: universal primary school enrollment (and, more recently, completion); equality of access for girls (gender parity) and other underserved groups; and improved learning outcomes. Because universal enrollment and completion assume equity of access, there are really two policy objectives: universal enrollment and completion, and improved learning outcomes.¹²

Evaluation Objectives and Design

The overall objective of this evaluation is to assess the development effectiveness of World Bank assistance to countries in their efforts to improve their basic knowledge and skills base through the provision of quality primary education to all children, particularly since the beginning of the EFA movement in 1990.

While the global EFA strategy advocates many channels for pursuing its learning goals, including schooling at the primary and lower secondary levels, nonformal education, early childhood development, adult literacy, and life skills programs, this evaluation focuses on Bank support for publicly provided primary education. This is not to deny the importance of the other channels, but reflects the fact that primary education has been the main vehicle of the Bank's assistance to EFA and that IEG has yet to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of Bank support to this subsector. The Bank's

project support for adult literacy programs has been previously reviewed (Abadzi 2003), as has its support to secondary education (Perkins 2004); and a review of support for early childhood development is being planned. An evaluation of support to primary education—by applying findings and lessons to the key assumptions and strategies of current programs—has the potential to substantially influence the strategic agenda and effectiveness of future policies aimed at the EFA goals, especially basic knowledge and skills acquisition for all.

The key questions addressed by this evaluation are the following:

- To what extent have the Bank's policies for primary education been implemented?
- How effective and sustainable have Bank-supported programs in primary education been in helping countries increase access to schooling and improve learning outcomes, especially for the most disadvantaged among and within countries?
- To what extent has support to primary education promoted institutional development?
- What are the lessons from experience, in terms of key factors or determinants of effectiveness of the Bank's assistance for primary education?

The evaluation traced the World Bank's support to countries through the results chain, from Bank inputs (such as finance, policy dialogue, and analytic work) to government inputs (policies and plans, public spending, and institutional capacity), to educational system inputs/service delivery (for example, classrooms, textbooks, trained teachers, and supervision/community involvement), to outputs (primary school enrollments and completion), to outcomes (basic knowledge and skills acquisition, and

The Fast-Track Initiative was created to accelerate attainment of the MDGs.

The Bank's policy objectives over 15 years consistently emphasized improved access and learning.

The Bank's main contribution to EFA has come through its support to universal primary education.

Box 1.3: Evaluation Building Blocks

- **Literature reviews** of (a) the rationale for investing in primary education and (b) the determinants of primary education outcomes in developing countries (Boissiere 2004a, b).
- **Review of World Bank documents** on primary education policy, project design and completion reports, education sector retrospectives (annual reports), research and policy dialogue reports, plus IEG evaluations of related sectors and subsectors.
- **An inventory and review of the portfolio of primary education projects** sponsored by the Education Sector of the Bank and by other sectors, covering more than 700 Bank-financed projects in more than 100 countries in a general way, and for more in-depth analysis, a random sample of 30 primary education investment projects (20 completed and 10 ongoing), 5 Education Sector adjustment projects, and 15 adjustment and investment projects managed by other sectors that allocated the most to primary education (IEG 2004d). Together these 50 projects comprise the portfolio sample.
- **Field-based evaluations of completed primary education projects:** Project Performance Assessment Reports (PPARs) in Honduras, India, Niger, Uganda, Uruguay, Vietnam, and the Republic of Yemen, and an impact study on basic education in Ghana.
- **Field-based country case studies** for an in-depth, contextualized view of the impact of the entirety of the Bank's lending, analytical work, and policy dialogue on primary education in Mali, Pakistan, Peru, and Romania. (See Appendix F for more details on case study selection and methods and Appendix G for summaries of the case study reports.)

welfare/employment outcomes).¹³ A full description of the analytic framework, the evaluation design, and instruments is in Appendix B. Note that learning outcomes (basic knowledge and skills) are the ultimate results in the “results chain” but that access to and completion of primary education of good quality are among the major inputs to achieving them.

This approach resulted in a number of discrete activities or intermediate outputs that served as building blocks for the evaluation (box 1.3), most of which can be accessed in the evaluation Web site (www.worldbank.org/ieg/education). The evaluation also builds on the findings of a joint evaluation of donor support to basic education, conducted in 2003 with 12 other donors and led by the Netherlands (Joint Evaluation 2003).¹⁴

The next chapter provides an overview of the evolution of the portfolio of lending and analytic

work, with respect to their magnitude and geographic distribution, objectives, the activities supported, and overall performance in meeting their objectives.

Chapter 3 examines in depth the experience of Bank support in helping countries meet the central objectives of improving both access to primary education and learning outcomes. This rich experience not only points to key accomplishments and shortcomings but also to key lessons for countries and the Bank in enhancing the performance of primary education systems.

Chapter 4 examines Bank support to countries in improving sector management and governance in their pursuits of better educational outcomes.

Finally, Chapter 5 presents the study's main conclusions and recommendations.

