A world of discrimination: minorities, indigenous peoples and education

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Education is a basic human right, but in all regions of the world minority and indigenous children are being deprived of a quality education or access to schools at all. Of the 101 million children out of school and the 776 million adults who cannot read and write, the majority are from ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities or indigenous peoples. Numerous states are violating international laws and standards by failing to provide adequate education for minorities. The costs of failing to provide education for all are massive, holding back economic growth and potentially sowing the seeds for conflicts. Yet the international community – governments and aid donors alike – has still not fully woken up to the need to address inequities in education, and specifically the needs of minorities and indigenous peoples.

At the UN Forum on Minority Issues (UN Forum), held for the first time in December 2008, speaker after speaker gave evidence about educational discrimination and exclusion in their country. Often, national laws bar or reduce minorities' access to school, or teaching passes over the history or culture of minority groups; further, schooling is often only available in the dominant, official language rather than in mother tongues spoken by minorities, or else personal abuse is heaped on people from minorities by other pupils and even teachers. In most developing countries – but especially in those schools attended by minorities, which tend to be in poorer, more remote areas – overcrowded classrooms, dilapidated buildings, few textbooks, few sanitary facilities and poor teaching are all too common, and are holding back the educational and life opportunities of millions of children.

According to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), 'as an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty'. Yet educational discrimination against, and exclusion of, minorities is perpetuating poverty, depriving people of fulfilling their potential and of playing a meaningful role in society. As articulated by the former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Katarina Tomaševski, education must meet the 'four As': it must be available (free and government-funded), accessible (non-discriminatory and accessible to all), acceptable (culturally appropriate and with good quality teaching) and adaptable (evolving with the changing needs of society). Ensuring access to such schooling for minorities is the greatest challenge facing policy makers in the field of education. Furthermore, in a world where inter-ethnic and inter-religious violence is present, and in some cases rising, improvement in the education of minority groups to help create more tolerant, multicultural societies is surely one of the very greatest challenges the world faces.

The most marginalized

It is clear that the major global education targets set by the international community will not be met on time. The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on education, set in 2000, is to ensure that by 2015 all boys and girls will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. In the same year, states meeting at the 'Education for All' conference in Dakar, Senegal, committed themselves to ensuring that all 'those belonging to ethnic minorities' would have 'access to complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality'. At that time 113 million children were out of school. Since then there has been progress in reducing the numbers, but not enough to meet the target: the latest estimate by UNICEF is that 101 million children remain out of school, 53 million of whom are girls and most of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa or South and West Asia. Projections by UNESCO for 134 states are that at least 29 million children in those countries alone will still be out of school in 2015.

The world will fail to meet the MDG on education until policies are properly targeted on the needs of minorities and indigenous peoples, to ensure they receive an education consistent with the 'four As'. There are several reasons why states are failing to educate all children, but a major one is simply that many governments do not properly recognize who those out of school actually are. UN agencies working on education do not provide statistics on exactly how many of the 101 million children are from minority and indigenous populations, but the evidence suggests it is between 50 and 70 per cent. The developing countries with the largest number of children out of school – Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Nigeria and Pakistan – all have large minority populations who enjoy far less access to schooling than majority groups. In Nigeria, for example, estimates are that 54 per cent of all out-of-school children are Hausas from the predominantly

Muslim north of the country. In India, around 41 per cent of those out of school are from the 'scheduled castes' (or 'Dalits', previously known as 'untouchables') or from the 'scheduled tribes' (or 'Adivasis').

A 2006 analysis noted that of the 60 million girls not in primary school (based on 2002 figures showing 115 million children then out of school), a full 70 per cent came from ethnic minorities and other excluded groups, as shown in Table 1.

When it comes to adults around the world unable to read and write, minorities also account for a large proportion of the total. Around 776 million people – 16 per cent of the world's adult population – lack basic literacy skills, two-thirds of whom are women. Of these, 270 million are in India and 73 million in China. Again, there are no official figures citing how many of these are from minorities, but the available evidence is instructive:

- India's latest national census, in 2001, found that around 300 million Indians were illiterate (slightly higher than the figure cited by UNESCO). Of these, extrapolation from other statistics shows that around 120 million come from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, while a further 57 million were Muslims (41 per cent of the Muslim population in India being illiterate). Thus around 60 per cent of India's illiterate adults belong to minorities or indigenous peoples.
- UNESCO states that 73 million adults are illiterate in China. Although it is, again, not known exactly how many belong to minorities, around one-third of illiterate adults are believed to live in the western regions, which have the highest proportions of ethnic minorities in China, including Tibetans, Mongolians and Uyghurs. National statistics in 2000 reported 87 million adults as illiterate, of whom around 33 million lived in the 10 provinces (out of 31) where minorities account for the highest proportion of the population. It is in these regions, the mainly rural, western areas, where the illiteracy *rate* (i.e. as a proportion of the whole population) is the highest in the country: the five regions with the highest proportion of illiterate people are all among the 10 regions with the largest minorities. Overall, the illiteracy rate of national minorities in China is 25 per cent higher than the national average.

Table 1 Girls from excluded groups out of school

	Total number of girls out of school (million)	Excluded girls out of school (million)	Excluded girls as percentage of all girls out of school	Excluded groups
Sub-Saharan Africa	23.8	17.9	75	Members of non-dominant tribes
South Asia	23.6	15.8	67	Rural people in Afghanistan, scheduled castes and tribes in India, lower castes in Nepal, rural tribes in Pakistan
Middle East/North Africa	5.1	1.7	33	Berbers, rural populations
East Asia/Pacific	4.9	4.4	90	Hill tribes, Muslim minorities, other ethnic minorities
Eastern Europe/Central Asia	1.6	1.4	90	Roma, rural populations in Turkey
Latin America/Caribbean	1.5	1.5	99	Indigenous and Afro-Latino populations
Total	60.4	42.6	71	

Source: Maureen Lewis and Marlaine Lockheed, *Inexcusable Absence: Why 60 Million Girls Still Aren't in School and What to Do about It*, Centre for Global Development, December 2006, p. 8.

These figures suggest that the number of illiterate adults from minorities and indigenous peoples is around 162 million in India and 24 million in China; this amounts to a quarter of all the illiterate adults in the world. If those from other countries were included, it is very likely that minorities would account for the majority. By 2015, the UN projects that there will still be around 700 million adults worldwide unable to read or write. As with children out of school, strategies to address illiteracy will have to focus – overwhelmingly – on the education of minorities specifically.

Educational obstacles faced by minorities

Providing adequate education for minority groups is not a choice but a legal obligation on the part of states. Various international conventions outline the duty to respect the right to education and to avoid measures preventing it. UNESCO's 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education defined discrimination as 'depriving any person or group of persons of access to education of any type or at any level' and 'limiting any person or group of persons to education of an inferior standard'. States party to the agreement agreed 'to abrogate any statutory provisions and any administrative instructions and to discontinue any administrative practices which involve discrimination in education', and 'not to allow any differences of treatment by the public authorities between nationals, except on the basis of merit or need'. This was followed by the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which reaffirmed the right to education for all and the principle of free primary education.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989, has become the most widely ratified human rights treaty (of 194 states in the world only the United States and Somalia have not ratified) and provides the most detailed guidelines on rights-based education, spelling out the right of children not to be discriminated against. Article 30 provides specific protection for children from minority and indigenous groups who 'shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language'. In 2000, states also agreed in the Education for All (EFA) framework of action that 'education must neither exclude nor discriminate' and that 'every government has the responsibility to provide free, quality basic education'. It committed governments to 'actively seeking out children who are not enrolled' and to make the inclusion of minorities integral to education policy.

Years on from these commitments, the reality for minorities across the world is different. Access to good quality education is much more likely if you are a boy, living in an urban area and coming from a relatively wealthy household; being a girl is often the first obstacle to a quality education, living in a rural area the second, coming from a poor family the third. But then there is a fourth – belonging to a minority. The most discriminated against of all tend to be poor girls, living in poor families in rural areas who belong to a minority community. The obstacles preventing people from minorities receiving a good education are numerous, and it is useful to draw a distinction between problems that prevent them getting access to school at all and those that hinder their receiving an education of sufficient *quality* – that is, one that meets the 'four As' – once they are in school.

Problems getting to school

Official discrimination by states is one reason why minorities are often unable to attend school. Some states do not even formally recognize the existence of minorities, meaning that their commitment to establish schools in areas populated by minorities is low or non-existent. Turkey, for example,

continues to refuse to formally recognize the Kurdish minority, even though it amounts to 10–23 per cent of the population (estimates vary widely), while the Constitution prohibits public education in any language other than Turkish. The result is that education provision is extremely poor in the Kurdish areas, with most villages lacking a school or else having class numbers averaging around 50. In Japan, the government also does not recognize what it terms 'non-national' communities, which include Korean communities, whose schools receive no government subsidies and where diplomas do not qualify them to enter Japanese universities.

Despite official discrimination in some states, more than 90 per cent of countries have laws requiring all children to attend school; thus the bigger problem, across the globe, is the failure to implement existing legislation. Many governments simply lack the will to establish schools in all the areas that need them, especially in more remote, rural areas. Yet proximity to a school is by some estimates the biggest determinant of primary school enrolment and children are much more likely to attend schools in their own village. A longer distance to school means attendance is less likely, especially for girls.

Many governments do not spend enough to fulfil their national and international commitment to ensure education for all. In 40 out of 105 countries with available data, the share of national income devoted to education decreased between 1999 and 2006. Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia now spend only 3–4 per cent of their GNP on education, signifying a low political commitment. Little data is available on education expenditure on minorities or on schools in areas populated by minorities, but it is generally likely to be lower than spending on majority communities. In Israel, government figures show that state investment per Arab student is three times less than for Jewish students; Arab schools have more students per class (30 compared to 26 in Jewish schools) and fewer teaching hours per class (48 compared to 60). In Macedonia, the authorities also spend less on minorities than on the majority group – in 2005, the government devoted $548 per pupil in schools primarily attended by Macedonians, compared to $404 for those attended by Albanians.

Poverty is, however, probably the biggest single reason why so many children remain out of school. The need for children to work on household tasks

Left: Children from the Xavante people play within the Xavante protected area, Mato Grosso, Brazil. *Eduardo Martino/Panos*.

such as farming is a major factor explaining why many rural families, dependent on agriculture for their survival, do not send their children to school. In this situation, the poorer the family, the less likely the children will attend school. In Guatemala, for example, only 4 per cent of 'extremely poor' indigenous girls attend school by the age of 16, compared to 20 per cent of 'poor' indigenous girls and 45 per cent of 'non-poor' indigenous girls. The high costs of school are a further prohibitive factor, especially for poorer people. Various international standards, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), all state that primary education 'shall be free', but around 100 countries still do not provide free primary education to all their children. Since 2000, however, more than a dozen countries have abolished school fees which, in Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda, has helped more than a million extra children enrol in primary school in each country. Yet even where there are no school fees, there will tend to be some indirect costs for families such as uniforms, textbooks and transport, which, for marginalized, poorer groups, can be insurmountable. A survey in Tajikistan found that 68 per cent of parents consulted reported that cost was the main reason for not sending their daughters to school.

Parents' low educational attainment can be passed on to the next generation; in Nepal, for example, children whose parents had some formal education are more than twice as likely to send their children to school compared to parents lacking formal education. Cultural attitudes among some communities, such as those attaching more importance to boys' education while promoting early marriages for daughters, can also keep girls out of school. For others, education may promise little for the future due to broader prejudice or labour discrimination in society, when even completing school means that people from minorities are less able to secure well-paid jobs than people from majority groups.

Problems in school

Once in school, many children in developing countries, especially in rural areas, receive an extremely poor-quality education; for minority groups, this is widespread. The biggest single result is high drop-out rates – in sub-Saharan Africa, less than two-thirds of all enrolled pupils reach the last grade in the majority of countries. The quality of schools and teachers tends to be lower in more remote, disadvantaged areas, where minorities often live. Teachers are often less qualified, come to work infrequently or promote repetitive, rote learning rather than passing on skills to promote creative thinking. In many countries, few teachers are recruited from minorities, sometimes because there are few of them, sometimes because the state has failed to develop a proactive strategy. There is a general lack of trained teachers, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia – more than 18 million extra teachers will be needed over the next decade to provide every child with a quality primary education. In addition, the more remote the school, the more chance that, in countries where corruption is rife, central government funding will not reach it. A study in 2004 in four African countries (Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) found that only around half of non-wage budgets ever reaches the intended schools.

Segregation of minority from majority groups – either in separate schools or in separate classes – continues to be an all-too-common feature of schooling in some countries, as with the Roma in Europe (see below). Dalit children in India are often segregated in classrooms and during school meals, and disproportionately subjected to corporal punishment by teachers; likewise, Dalit teachers are often discriminated against, frequently being segregated when eating or drinking. Although the Indian government operates a system of 'reservation' or quotas for Dalits in education as well as in government jobs, the policy is poorly implemented. The European Union's (EU) Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) has noted that educational segregation produces and reproduces inequalities, as do highly differentiated education systems which lead to a high concentration of discriminated pupils in the lowest educational tracks. A recent UN report states that 'desegregation strategies in the field of education should be actively pursued'.

Equally destructive of minority and indigenous rights is some states' policy of trying to assimilate smaller groups and assert the dominance of the majority group; indeed, for some governments it is precisely education policy that is seen as a key tool to achieve this. In Asia, some countries put minority or indigenous children from remote areas into boarding hostels far from home, a strategy taking place under the banner of expanding access to education under the MDGs.

But the classic way of pursuing assimilation is to offer schooling only (or predominantly) in the majority language, in the face of different mother tongues being spoken by minorities. Although Syria, for example, has around 1.5 million Kurds, the law requires teaching to be undertaken in Arabic and forbids children from being taught in the Kurdish language. In Kurdish areas, teachers tend to be poorly trained and there is no public university, while less than 5 per cent of children attend secondary school, meaning that child labour rather than education has become the norm. The absence of early-years schooling in their mother tongue is often a massive obstacle to children's educational development: they may not know the official language at all, in which case they may be put off attending school, may simply not be offered a place at school or, if they do attend, may make slow progress.

Children are often disadvantaged in school if the language they speak at home is different from the dominant, official language used in school. In Latin America, children from homes where indigenous

languages are spoken perform less well in reading and mathematics than those from non-indigenous households. When home language and official national languages differ, the chances of completing at least one grade of secondary school are reduced: in Bolivia, 68 per cent of Spanish speakers aged 16–49 have completed some secondary education compared to one-third of Aymara, Quechua and Guarani speakers. Mathura Tripura of the Bangladeshi NGO, Zabarang Kalyan Samity, told the UN Forum in December 2008 that indigenous children in the Chittagong Hill Tracts 'are turning away for not speaking Bangla and they are experiencing education in a totally unfamiliar language'; these children drop out from school at a rate double the national average.

As UNESCO points out, children taught in their mother tongue in the initial years of school have a better chance of becoming literate in other languages and tend to stay in school longer; if schools teach in a home language, attendance rises by around 10 per cent. A number of UN standards affirm the responsibility of states to teach children in their mother tongue. Some countries educate children in their mother tongue in their early years before offering schooling in the dominant language, with positive effect. Bilingual teaching is critical, as it is equally vital that minorities educated in their own language are also able to speak the dominant language, otherwise their exclusion will be reinforced. But even where a bilingual policy is implemented, minorities in particular can suffer from lack of specialized teaching training or appropriate school materials.

A particular problem for minorities and indigenous peoples is the school curriculum in many countries. Pupils are often taught lessons of little relevance to their culture, where their history is excluded, and over which their parents have had little or no say. Karamojong pastoralists in north-east Uganda, for example, have a literacy rate four times less than the national average. One local human rights group giving evidence to the UN Forum on Minorities notes that a key reason for this is the curriculum, which 'stereotypes pastoralists and their livelihood system as outdated, disorganized, environmentally destructive and economically unproductive'; school children are 'trained to loathe pastoralism', while those from pastoralist families 'become alienated from the reality facing them and become dependent on an imaginary way of life remote from their context'.

Also of concern is the direct personal abuse in school often heaped on children from minorities, which can harm their ability to learn and reduce their achievement. Such discrimination, by other children and even teachers, is an all-too-common experience for many children – a factor that is sometimes identified by parents as a reason for keeping their children out of school altogether. Teachers can sit minority children or girls at the back of the class, not call on them in class or give them fewer textbooks. Meghna Guhathakurta, of the NGO Research Initiatives in Bangladesh, notes that Dalit groups 'are made to sit at the back, given punishments that are considered befitting for them like cleaning the toilets, and generally discouraged to envisage a future that is free from the fetters of their immediate surroundings or social position'. Vimal Thorat, of the National Platform for Dalit Women's Rights in India, told the UN Forum that 'by and large teachers reflect the same attitudes and practices against minority students as what is prevalent in the larger society'.

Indigenous communities

Indigenous peoples have to confront particular obstacles to education and tend to face discrimination that excludes them from access to schools or else attempts to assimilate them into mainstream culture. In Guatemala, for example, only 54 per cent of indigenous girls aged 7 are in school compared to 75 per cent of non-indigenous girls. In Laos, 46 per cent of poor, rural non-Lao-Tai girls aged 6–12 attend school compared to 70 per cent of poor, rural Lao-Tai girls. Indigenous children are often deprived of schooling in their mother tongue while teaching downplays or ignores their community's history or traditional knowledge, meaning the school curriculum is often far removed from their cultural practice. The overall quality of schools in the areas in which indigenous children live – often more remote, poorer areas – is also usually lower. The result is that indigenous children tend to drop out of school more frequently. In Ecuador, for example, indigenous children are 30 per cent more likely to drop out of

Right: The fourth grade class from the Afro-Honduran community of Bajamar Garífuna studying at the Francisco Marozan school, San Pedro Sula, Honduras. *Giacomo Pirozzi/Panos.*

schools in rural areas than non-indigenous children, while in Bolivia the primary school completion rate of indigenous children is 55 per cent compared to 81 per cent for non-indigenous children. Overall literacy rates among indigenous communities also tend to be lower: in Ecuador, the literacy rate for indigenous groups is 72 per cent, compared to the average of 91 per cent; in Vietnam the rate is a staggering 17 per cent for minorities compared to a national average of 87 per cent.

A world of discrimination and exclusion

All these educational obstacles for minorities and indigenous peoples have different effects in different countries, but common outcomes are lower attendance at school and lower achievement, including literacy rates, as highlighted in the selection of examples in Table 2 (p. 20).

Although the majority of children out of school are in developing countries, there are also alarming disparities in educational provision and attainment in the developed world. In the EU, for example, damning analysis is now regularly produced by the FRA, established in March 2007. Its latest annual report notes that 'partial or even total segregation is still a common phenomenon in large parts of the EU' and that 'some member states persistently ignore the effects that highly differentiated and selective school systems have on widening the education gap between more privileged and less privileged population groups'. Although some EU member states report a narrowing of the gap in educational attainment between the majority and minority communities, the FRA notes that in general that attainment gap 'has remained at a significant level'. Furthermore, most member states do not know how well minorities are performing at school compared to the majority – there is a lack of official reporting of discriminatory practices in the field of education in most member states and in some countries there are no official statistics at all. Only two of the EU's 27 member states (the UK and Netherlands) have comprehensive monitoring systems registering performance differences among minorities in education.

The situation is starkest in the treatment of the Roma community. In several EU countries, such as Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, Roma children are subject to segregated, Roma-only classes or units within schools. The FRA's latest annual report notes that in one school in Slovakia, in the town of Medzev, Roma and non-Roma children were not only separated in classes but also during breaks, which were scheduled at different times for each group; non-Roma children received hot meals in a school canteen while Roma children were only

Table 2 Examples of the effects of educational obstacles for minority and indigenous peoples

Bangladesh	In the Chittagong Hill Tracts in eastern Bangladesh, home to 1.3 million people of different indigenous groups, only 57 per cent of indigenous children aged 6–10 are enrolled in primary schools while 60 per cent of those attending school drop out – double the national drop-out rate (see Asia chapter).
Brazil	Only 6 per cent of black people attend university, compared to 19 per cent of whites.
China	One in twelve young people from minority communities have not attended formal schooling, compared to only one in 50 Han Chinese. Fewer than one in 10 Han Chinese are illiterate, compared to nearly one in two Tibetans.
Colombia	Around one-third of the indigenous and Afro-Colombian population is illiterate, a rate nearly three times that of the rest of the population. Around 36 per cent of the indigenous population have never received any formal education.
Ethiopia	The majority of pastoralists have received no formal education at all. In the Somali region of Ethiopia, the literacy rate for male pastoralists is 23 per cent and for women just 4 per cent.
India	While 65 per cent of the general population can read and write, only 55 per cent of Dalits and 47 per cent of Adivasis can do so. For women it is worse: only 35 per cent of Adivasi women are literate, while in some states the rate is even lower – only 16 per cent of Adivasi women in Bihar are literate, for example. Around 37 per cent of Dalit and Adivasi girls aged 7–14 do not attend school, compared to 26 per cent from the majority population.
Nepal	The literacy rate for the 'upper' castes is 67 per cent, compared to 34 per cent for Dalits and 54 per cent for Janajati (indigenous groups).
Pakistan	Less than 10 per cent of girls from the Balochi and Pathan ethnic minorities in rural areas complete primary school, compared to over 20 per cent of Punjabi girls (the largest ethnic group) in rural areas and 55 per cent of Punjabi girls in urban areas.
Serbia	Fewer than one in 10 Roma have completed primary school, while 63 per cent have had no education at all; this compares to the majority population, 100 per cent of whom begin school and 90 per cent of whom complete primary school.
United Kingdom	Children of Afro-Caribbean origin are the lowest achievers on average at key exam stages (though a greater proportion of white children fail than those of Indian origin). A study for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that 8 per cent of children of African origin and 6.3 per cent of children of Caribbean origin achieved no GCSEs (school leaving certificate) in 2003, compared to 5.3 per cent of white children.
United States	While three out of four white students graduate from public high school, only just over one out of two African-American or Hispanic students do. In some large public school districts with high ethnic minority populations, the graduation rates are even worse – in Detroit, for example, it is 25 per cent and in Baltimore 35 per cent.

given food packages. In Macedonia, an EU candidate country, the OSCE's High Commissioner on National Minorities, Knut Vollebaek, warned in January 2009 of the 'creeping separation' in education and that 'segregation undermines the very basis on which your children learn to build a shared society'.

Benefits and costs

Education provides enormous economic benefits for countries, while the failure to educate often imposes enormous costs. There is, for example, strong evidence linking education to higher economic growth and productivity. As UNESCO has noted, some studies suggest that an additional year of schooling for a population lifts annual GDP growth by 0.37 per cent. Research by the International Food Policy Research Institute found that spending on education in rural areas, along with agricultural research (into farming techniques or seed varieties, for example) and rural infrastructure (principally roads), are the three most effective types of investment for reducing rural poverty; in China, India, Uganda and Vietnam, for example, investments in these areas had the biggest impacts.

Education, especially of mothers, also improves public health, tending to lead to better nutrition, lower fertility, better uptake of childhood immunization and improved knowledge of HIV prevention. In many countries, having a mother with secondary or higher education more than halves the risk of child mortality compared to having a mother with no education. In Bangladesh, having a mother who has completed primary education cuts the risk of children being stunted by 20 per cent. UNESCO also argues that education helps to build people's support for multi-party democracy and to equip populations with more skills to challenge autocracy, and also that it can provide children with the learning needed to better understand complex environmental challenges, such as climate change.

As for the costs of failing to deliver education, some policy makers argue (or else may privately believe) that it will simply be too expensive to educate everyone, especially minorities. It is certainly true that a large proportion of children currently out of school, and illiterate adults, are 'harder to reach'; they can live in geographically remote areas, require 'special' teaching, such as in minority languages, or may belong to nomadic or traveller groups (See Care Study, p. 36). It will certainly cost more to educate these people, but much evidence suggests that it will cost a lot more not to. For example, one study for the Inter-American Development Bank notes that if Bolivia, Brazil, Guatemala and Peru ended their discrimination against Afro-descendant and indigenous groups, their economies would grow by 36.7, 12.8, 13.6 and 4.2 per cent respectively – very large numbers that are likely to dwarf the initial costs of education. Especially when a minority group is relatively large compared to the broader population, discrimination against it hurts the wider economy. For example, it is estimated that had Guatemala increased secondary school attendance among its indigenous population from the existing 7 per cent in 1960 to 50 per cent, the country's per capita growth rate from 1960 to 1985 might have increased by 1.3 per cent per year. UNESCO notes that several cost-effective measures to promote inclusive quality education have been developed in countries with scarce resources. These include training-of-trainer models, linking student teachers with schools and converting special needs schools into resource centres providing support and expertise to clusters of regular schools.

Failing to provide education to all can have even greater consequences. In countries such as Burundi, Rwanda and Sudan, exclusion from school and the lack of educational opportunities for young people have been critical factors in fuelling conflict over past decades. In Sierra Leone, a similar lack of educational opportunities, along with other social inequities, is widely seen as explaining why many young people took to supporting the Revolutionary United Front, the brutal rebel organization that terrorized the country for a decade. Studies in developed countries also suggest that inequality in education contributes to wider income inequalities and social polarization, which can contribute to increasing social tensions. The relatively poor access of the Catholic community to education in Northern Ireland, for example, helped fuel the conflict with Protestants; whereas the increasing access of Catholics to higher education was one of the factors contributing to reconciliation between the communities.

International policies – not much better?

Unfortunately, it is not only governments' domestic policies that are failing to provide adequate education for minorities; the international community is contributing too. For example, World Bank-sponsored Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) are meant to be the developing countries' flagship strategies for promoting economic growth and poverty reduction, approved and backed by aid donors. They can take years to produce and go through numerous drafts and political bargains; once delivered, countries can receive tens, sometimes, hundreds of millions of dollars worth of aid. However, in most cases, minority groups generally – and the education of minorities in particular – are ignored in the PRSPs. UNESCO's analysis of 18 countries' most recent PRSPs concludes that none of them mentions education of religious minority groups; only two mention strategies to address

inequities for ethnic minorities in primary education (one noting the provision of stipends, another the language of instruction) and only one does so for secondary education (mentioning the importance of curriculum relevance). A study of 15 country PRSPs by the Chronic Poverty Research Centre at the University of Manchester found that ethnic minorities were not mentioned at all in six and only mentioned once in a further three. Another academic study found that of 37 PRSPs, 16 did not mention minority groups at all; only in a small number of countries is there a focus on the education of ethnic minorities, such as Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, which stress the importance of reducing inequities and enhancing access to education.

The UN Forum notes that 'minorities have a right to participate in the life of the state and in decisions affecting them', and that in the field of education 'this right implies minority input into the design and implementation of education programmes'. There is little evidence that this is happening in most of the PRSPs being drawn up with the help of the world's major aid donors. Clearly, Southern governments, with the support of donors, must revise their national policy strategies to address the needs of minority groups, especially in education. Until they do, the MDG on education will not be met.

A second concern is with development cooperation assistance itself. There are simply no figures showing how much aid donors devote to supporting the education of minorities. Given that they are likely to constitute the majority of children out of school and of illiterate adults, this is a fundamental failing. It can, however, be presumed that the amount of aid targeting minorities is very low. For example, donors provide only a fifth of their education aid to *basic* education – $2.1 billion out of $9.8 billion, according to the most recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) statistics. Indeed, donors spend more than twice as much on the administrative costs of their own aid programmes ($4.7 billion) as they do on basic education. Some bilateral donors devote an even smaller proportion of their education aid to basic education – France devotes 12 per cent, for example, at the same time as devoting two-thirds to funding students studying at French tertiary institutions. Donors generally are not living up to their commitments: in the Dakar framework of action, for example, rich countries affirmed 'that no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources'.

Third, the broader macro-economic policies being promoted by the international financial institutions have had some major impacts on education policy. For example, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has been pursuing a policy of placing ceilings on the public sector wage bill in several countries as a criterion for providing loans. A report by the international NGO ActionAid on three such countries – Malawi, Mozambique and Sierra Leone – noted that by insisting on overly restrictive macro-economic policies that constrain government spending on wages, the IMF was in part responsible for the persisting teacher shortage in those countries. In Sierra Leone, for example, the IMF determined the level of the ceiling and the government duly placed a cap on the number of teachers it could hire as a result. In all three countries, the ceiling was too low for the government to hire the teachers needed to achieve the pupil–teacher ratio of 40:1 recommended by the Education for All – Fast-Track Initiative, a partnership between donors and developing countries to ensure progress towards the MDG on education. Following the ActionAid report, the IMF said that it would in future restrict the use of wage bill ceilings and deploy them more selectively. Although it has done this, it continues to maintain budget caps, low inflation or deficit targets in developing countries that limit government spending flexibility, meaning that some governments still face constraints in recruiting a sufficient number of teachers.

Future policies and recommendations

Given political will, sustained commitment and adequate resources, massive progress in education can and has been made. Globally, the number of children out of school has come down over the past decade. UNESCO notes that Ethiopia and Tanzania, for example, have made remarkable progress in increasing school enrolment, thanks to policies such as abolishing school fees, constructing schools in unserved areas and increasing teacher recruitment; Tanzania has cut the number of children out of school by 3 million since 1999.

But governments are not giving sufficient attention to reducing inequities in education and to focusing explicitly on the educational needs of minorities and indigenous peoples. Both developing and developed country governments, as well as development donors and the international financial institutions, now need to move into a new phase of re-targeting education policies on those most marginalized. The recommendations on the right to education made by the UN Forum state that 'authorities should remove direct institutional barriers to educational access for minorities and address cultural and linguistic barriers that may have equivalent access-denying effects'. These policies should be accompanied by other social programmes to reduce minorities' marginalization and promote broader social inclusion.

There is no blueprint and countries clearly need to promote policies not only according to national circumstances but also the particular needs of minorities and indigenous peoples. But common education policies are likely to involve: removing school fees, building more and better schools in rural communities and recruiting more local, bilingual and minority-language teachers. Segregation that discriminates against minority groups should be abolished, and other discriminatory laws and policies removed. Curricula need to be revised to take account of minority and indigenous cultures (which means the participation of those groups in education policy). Overall, states need to provide appropriate budgetary allocations in recognition of the special needs of minorities. Developed and developing countries need seriously to improve their collection of data to assess how education policy is benefiting particular communities. Developing country governments, the World Bank and other donors must ensure that PRSPs include strategies to focus explicitly on the educational needs of minorities and indigenous peoples. Donors must also report how much of their spending on education is devoted to minorities and ensure that aid is better targeted on them.

There are particular challenges in ensuring that good-quality education reaches marginalized minority and indigenous *girls*. Both improving the opportunities for attending and completing school, and boosting the demand for education are critical. Improvements in the quality of schooling are important in light of evidence that girls are more likely than boys not to enrol in poor-quality schools, or drop out. Policies such as ensuring the physical safety of girls on their way to school and establishing special in-school programmes targeted at girls can help. Cash transfers to poor families to help with some school costs, and targeted scholarships and stipends for girls can help to create incentives for families to send their daughters to school.

Finally, some key principles need to underpin improved access to education. Human rights, including minority and indigenous rights, should pervade all aspects of school activity, and not just consist of a booklet with guidelines. Training for teachers, administrators and support staff is needed so that they understand and implement these values. Intercultural education should be a part of state education strategy, so that cultural differences are understood and respected.

Increased cooperation and the development of joint initiatives between governmental bodies, educational institutions and NGOs is needed. Women and men from minority and indigenous communities should be fully involved in educational reform. Regular and intensive consultation of policy makers with local stakeholders is needed to identify the best methods and policies to address communities' educational needs. Minority and indigenous organizations, parents and community representatives should be enabled to take a more proactive role and fully participate in formulating the education philosophy on the local level. ■