Literacy and non-formal education are specifically mentioned in three of the six Dakar goals. This is a measure of their importance for achieving Education for All. The magnitude of the EFA challenge implies that, in addition to ensuring primary schooling, more efforts are needed to develop literacy and non-formal education so as to reach those children, youths and adults who are unreached by the formal system.

While many educational authorities are fully aware of the need for literacy and non-formal education, these sub-sectors suffer from a lack of recognition. This translates into insufficient training, low salary and status of literacy teachers, insufficient co-ordination between non-formal education providers (government and NGOs) and inadequacy of public investment. Often perceived as second class, literacy and non-formal education are undervalued by parents and communities and receive less national and external funding than the formal system.

As a consequence, most literacy and non-formal education activities are run by NGOs and non-profit organizations rather than governments and, despite the extent of the problem, projects are relatively small-scale.

**What is literacy?**

Considerable evolution in thinking about literacy has occurred in recent years. Illiteracy is now viewed as a structural phenomenon and a social responsibility. Likewise, whereas literacy used to be viewed as a panacea for educational development, it is now seen in the broader context of educational and socio-economic interventions.

Literacy is always “functional”, that is, meaningful and useful for children, young people and adults. And literacy learning needs and uses change over time. Being able to read, write and calculate in today’s complex world is not enough. Skills training, health and environmental education, and computer literacy are increasingly considered part of the literacy endeavour.

**The scope of illiteracy**

There are today worldwide still more than 550 million female and 300 million male adult illiterates. To achieve the Dakar literacy goal, the world’s adult illiteracy rate has to be reduced from its current level of 21 per cent to about 10 percent by 2015. In other words, the literacy rate for adults must reach at least 90 percent by 2015. This means that the number of adult literates will have to increase annually by 92 million, or 42 percent more than the current figure. Such a rate represents 1.3 times the previous effort.
While some regions of the world, notably East Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, could meet the Dakar literacy goal by maintaining almost the same efforts as in the past decade, other regions face substantial challenges. The challenge is particularly acute in the least developed countries, where success will require more than a doubling of past efforts. Egypt and India will have to double their efforts, while Bangladesh and Pakistan will have to triple them.

Who is doing what in literacy and non-formal education?

Governments, non-governmental organizations and UN agencies, mainly UNESCO, are active in literacy and non-formal education. Some examples of government activities include Egypt’s National Campaign for Literacy and Adult Education and India’s National Literacy Mission. Other examples to be mentioned are Guatemala’s Basic Education for Work Project which targets sixty communities in the country’s poor rural areas. UNESCO Bangkok’s APPEAL programme has for many years promoted community learning centres in the region, providing literacy and non-formal education to communities.

UNESCO focuses on support for literacy and non-formal education at the international, regional, national and community levels, with particular emphasis on women’s literacy and on projects addressing marginalized youth, and rural and indigenous populations. Actions include policy advice, capacity building and concrete country- and community-based activities. Considering the new vision of literacy, UNESCO’s activities in this field include health, basic skills training, income generating schemes, and civic and cultural development.

NGOs have promoted new methods, such as ActionAid’s participatory, learner-centred approach (known as REFLECT). In many countries NGOs link literacy with local income-generation and cultural development. Since adults learn what is useful and relevant for them in their own circumstances, it is often local NGO programmes which are most effective. Frequently they promote literacy in the local language, as well as in widely-spoken languages which adults want to learn.

Monitoring non-formal programmes

Current EFA monitoring systems are mainly based on formal education. The role played by non-formal programmes is often underestimated. Non-formal education information systems need to be set up to facilitate comprehensive monitoring and evaluation. In 2000, UNESCO initiated a programme to develop a comparative and adaptable methodology for monitoring non-formal education initiatives and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics has also taken preliminary steps to develop new indicators for the non-formal sector.

Next steps

Mindful of the magnitude of the problem and the enormous task ahead, the United Nations General Assembly is planning to proclaim in 2002 a United Nations Decade for Literacy within the global efforts for Education for All and is expected to entrust UNESCO with the task of leading the ten-year challenge. The prime purpose of the decade is to mobilize governments and civil society to recognize the importance of creating literate environments and providing quality non-formal learning opportunities.

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Visit the Education for All website on www.unesco.org/education/efa
Why do girls and women need special attention?

Though everyone has an equal right to education, girls and women lag far behind boys and men. Two out of three of the 110 million children in the world who do not attend school are girls – and there are 42 million fewer girls than boys in primary school. Even if girls start school, they are far less likely to complete their education. Girls who miss out on primary education grow up to become the women who make up two-thirds of the world’s 875 million illiterate adults.

Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Middle East and North Africa have the widest gender gaps. A six-year-old girl in South Asia will typically spend six years in school, compared with nine years for a boy. Living in the countryside widens the gap; a girl living in a rural area is three times more likely to drop out of school than a city boy.

Yet education is not only their fundamental right, but an effective way of achieving higher economic growth as well as social well-being. Educated girls marry later, have fewer children, and feed and look after themselves and their family better. Their survival rate is higher, and their daughters are themselves more likely to go to school. Studies have shown that women with some education are more productive than those with none, for example in agriculture.

Why do girls miss out?

The reasons are often related to poverty or traditional beliefs and practices – in some cultures, girls’ education is regarded as less important than boys’; the female role remains tied to marriage and child-rearing, and girls are often given household and childcare duties instead of an education. Sometimes parents remove their daughters from school at puberty fearing sexual harassment by a pupil or teacher, an unwanted pregnancy, or early marriage, or because there are no toilet facilities. Over-aged girls often cannot enter formal school.

Educational costs, such as fees, uniforms and books, often deter parents from educating girls; sending a daughter to school means she cannot work to earn money.

Even if they do attend school, many girls fall behind because of poor educational quality, gender discrimination in schools, and in curriculum choice and learning materials as well as bias in teaching methods and teachers’ attitudes. National indebtedness or low priority for education funding can mean too few school places or inadequate facilities (such as lavatories), leading to exclusion of girls.

What is the EFA commitment?

The Dakar Framework for Action set the goal of eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, achieving gender equality in education by
2015 and ensuring that girls are not denied their right to education. To this end, the United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, launched a 10-year flagship programme, the UN Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI), at Dakar.

What is UNGEI?

A partnership between thirteen UN entities to help governments meet their commitments to ensure that all girls receive a quality education. Led by UNICEF, this initiative also involves bilateral agencies, civil society, NGOs, the private sector and governments.

Its five core strategic objectives are to:
- build political and resource commitments for girls’ education;
- end the gender gap in attendance and completion;
- eliminate gender bias within national educational systems;
- support girls’ education in areas affected by or recovering from armed conflict, natural disasters or external shocks;
- eliminate social and cultural discrimination that limits the demand for girls’ schooling.

Co-operative activities in girls’ education are taking place in more than seventy countries. For example, Egypt’s Education Minister made a commitment to close sizeable gender gaps in basic education, beginning with two pilot projects which include reaching out-of-school children.

In Nepal, where the girls’ enrolment rate lags 19 per cent behind that of boys, a new initiative to promote girls’ education is focusing on health education, community owned schools and capacity building of female teachers. Others are providing education to girl children of bonded labourers.

In Malawi, interventions have aimed at stemming the rise in girls’ drop-out rate, targeted youth participation and HIV/AIDS prevention, and promoted vocational training and cognitive and psycho-social skills for teenage girls.

Do other approaches exist?

While supporting the school-based elements of UNGEI, other agencies such as the World Bank, the World Food Programme (WFP) and a number of bilateral partners address the situation of out-of-school girls and women. UNESCO, for example, helps many countries to open up access of girls to education in non-formal settings and build bridges between them and the school. This gives girls who have dropped out a second chance and the opportunity to reintegrate the formal system. UNESCO also conducts advocacy with governments. Its “Working Document on Gender Equality in Basic Education: A Strategic Framework” provides countries with guiding principles on gender equality in education.

UNGEI partners

| UNICEF (lead agency) | www.unicef.org |
| DGO (Development Group Office) | www.undg.org |
| International Labour Office (ILO) | www.ilo.org |
| The World Bank | www.worldbank.org |
| UNAIDS | unaids.org |
| UN-DAW/DESA (Department of Economic and Social Affairs) | www.un.org/esa/desa.htm |
| UNESCO | www.unesco.org |
| UNFPA (UN Population Fund) | www.unfpa.org |
| UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees) | www.unhcr.ch |
| UNIFEM (UN Development Fund for Women) | www.unfpa.org |
| WFP (World Food Programme) | www.wfp.org |
| UNDP | www.undp.org |
| WHO (World Health Organization) | www.who.int |
Good health is essential for success in the classroom – and vice versa. Sick, weak or malnourished children perform less well at school than healthy, well-fed ones, and education plays an important part in improving pupils’ health and nutrition.

With the expansion of education in most countries, more children are attending school – the ideal place where health and education authorities can work together to improve and maintain child health and nourishment, keep at bay nutritional deficiencies or parasitic infections, and correct poor eyesight and hearing. Good health for pupils means higher school enrolment and attendance, and optimizes governments’ investment in education.

Health programmes also lead to greater social equity – the children who benefit most from them include the disadvantaged, such as girls, the disabled or the rural poor.

An inter-agency initiative called FRESH (Focusing Resources for Effective School Health) was launched at the World Education Forum to draw renewed attention to the links between health and education and raise awareness among ministers and other policy-makers of the importance of a comprehensive and effective school health programme as part of the EFA strategy.

What does FRESH advocate?

Its four-point plan comprises:

- Health-related school policies: to make schools safer, for example by eliminating sexual harassment, violence and bullying, and promoting inclusion by guaranteeing further education of pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers;

- Provision of safe water and sanitation: to prevent the spread of infectious disease and provide a healthy, safe and secure school environment – and to act as an example for students and the wider community;

- Skills-based health education: extending beyond physical health to include psycho-social and environmental health issues, to develop pupils’ knowledge, attitudes, values and lifestyles that will lead to good health – for example to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, injuries, violence and drug abuse;
School-based health and nutrition services: providing food supplements, deworming or spectacles can improve school performance.

What concrete actions are taking place?

Initiatives are mushrooming in many regions. Partners are providing financial support for FRESH projects in schools in fourteen African countries. Drug education in Viet Nam, in-service teacher training in Saudi Arabia and water and sanitation programmes in Burkina Faso, Colombia, Nicaragua, Nepal and Zambia are other projects.

Regional meetings and capacity-building workshops have been held in East Asia and the Pacific, and Health Promoting Schools networks are active in furthering comprehensive approaches to school health in Central and Eastern Europe and in Latin America and the Caribbean.

While all countries are called on to include school health in their EFA action plans, those belonging to WHO’s Mega-Country Health Promotion Network and UNESCO’s E9 initiative have become active participants in FRESH. They are Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russian Federation and the United States. All have more than 100 million inhabitants and together they comprise over three-fifths of the world’s population.

In July 2001 representatives from the education and health ministries of these most populous nations endorsed FRESH and committed themselves to promoting such actions as establishing school health co-ordinating bodies within their education ministries to be responsible for EFA links and follow-up, and sharing in health ministry initiatives concerning school health.

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**FRESH partners**

- UNESCO [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)
- UNICEF [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)
- World Health Organisation (WHO) [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)
- UNAIDS [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)
- FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)
- WFP (World Food Programme) [www.wfp.org](http://www.wfp.org)
- Global Partnership to Roll Back Malaria [www.rbm.who.int/](http://www.rbm.who.int/)
- Education International [www.ei-ie.org](http://www.ei-ie.org)
In less than two decades, HIV/AIDS has become a development disaster. Infection rates in Africa have reached alarming proportions, but they are also growing rapidly in Asia, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe. It is a severe obstacle to the EFA goals. Protecting a new generation from HIV/AIDS is integral to the future of education systems.

The scope of the problem

Infection and death rates are high among the skilled, trained and educated, draining countries of their intellectual resources and the groups most vital for development. AIDS has cut a deadly swathe through the teaching profession: up to 10 per cent of teachers are expected to die in the worst-affected African countries over the next five years.

Often the graduation rate from teacher-training colleges barely replaces the sick and dying workforce. Teacher deaths due to AIDS in Zambia in 1998 were equivalent to two-thirds of the number of newly qualified teachers, and those who die are often the most skilled and experienced. Consequently, teacher morale is often low; though the teachers themselves may not be infected, colleagues or family members might be. Education officials and planners, who keep the system running are also liable to be affected by the disease.

Fewer children can afford to attend school. Many drop out to look after infected family members or because they experience shame or stigma through association with the disease. In Côte d’Ivoire, for example, it is estimated that by the year 2010, there will be 778,000 maternal and double orphans, of which nearly three-quarters will be orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS. The pattern is much the same – or even worse – in Benin, Burkina Faso and Guinea.

Current strategies to combat the effect of HIV/AIDS

Some countries have launched ambitious programmes to combat the effect of HIV/AIDS.

Sri Lanka introduced AIDS preventive measures, adding “population and family life education” to the school curriculum in 1993.

Cambodia has translated educational material about HIV/AIDS prevention into Khmer and set up intensive teacher-training programmes.
The Daughters of Education project in Thailand funds the education of girls who would otherwise be sold into the sex trade.

Brazil has introduced a vast national prevention programme aimed at young people in and out of school, especially those difficult to reach.

In sub-Saharan Africa, a major effort in Senegal has prevented an epidemic and maintained one of the lowest infection rates in the region; reproductive health and sexuality are now taught in schools. After HIV infection rose to 10 per cent of adults in Uganda, the government introduced urgent measures to raise awareness, promote healthy behaviour and direct attention to people living with HIV/AIDS. New cases among the young have now fallen considerably.

Development partners are supporting these efforts. UNESCO and the World Health Organization (WHO), for example, have organized AIDS-awareness seminars for educational planners and developed resource materials on school health education to prevent AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

**Recent initiatives to accelerate action**

The World Education Forum set the stage for a renewed drive to fight the pandemic. UN agencies, civil society organizations and NGOs, schools and pupils are involved in this effort. One key focus is finding solutions to the severe shortage of trained teachers. Another is identifying good practices and easily adapted innovative approaches to curtail the spread of the disease.

Several recent initiatives have been launched to address these issues:

- UNESCO’s International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) has established a research unit related to the impact of HIV/AIDS on education systems and developed a strategy for HIV/AIDS preventive education. This strategy is based on the assumption that preventive education works if properly implemented, and focuses on five core tasks: advocacy at all levels; customizing the message and tailoring it to recipients; changing risk behaviour; caring for the infected and affected; and coping with the institutional impact of HIV/AIDS.

- The UNAIDS inter-agency working group on AIDS, Education and School (comprising UNDP, UNDCP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank), has developed a global strategy framework with the aim of cutting HIV-infection rates among young people in the most affected countries by 25 per cent by 2005 and worldwide by 2010.

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**Partners**

- UNAIDS [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)
- UNESCO [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)
- IIEP [www.iiep.unesco.org](http://www.iiep.unesco.org)
- UNDP [www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)
- UNDCP [www.undcp.org](http://www.undcp.org)
- UNFPA [www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org)
- UNICEF [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)
- WHO [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)
In pledging their support for civil society involvement in educational policy-making, participants at the World Education Forum gave international recognition to the role civil society plays in education.

Who makes up civil society?

The definition of civil society is the subject of much debate. In the context of EFA, civil society can be understood as all non-governmental and non-profit groups and associations involved in the education for all drive. It embraces NGOs and campaign networks, teacher unions and religious organizations, community associations and research networks, parents’ associations and professional bodies, student groups, social movements and others.

Civil society’s role in education

Though the state has the ultimate responsibility for and authority over education, civil society organizations play a major role. Three distinct roles can be identified:

- **service providers** where state provision is absent or insufficient. Civil society organizations are more flexible than the state and closer to the grassroots and local cultures. In many developing countries they take on responsibility for non-formal education programmes and are particularly successful in reaching the marginalized and excluded through approaches attuned to the needs and life conditions of the poor. They are particularly effective in areas such as community participation, empowerment, literacy, community schools, reproductive health and early childhood education.

- **innovators** and sources of ‘new’ thinking and practices — important if the EFA concept is to evolve and respond to change. In other words, they help fill the ‘ideas gap’.

- **informed critics and advocates** on a whole range of development issues. Collective NGO campaigns in recent years have lobbied in favour of free and compulsory quality education for children and for education programmes for out-of-school young people and adults.
What’s new?

Civil society organizations are increasingly organizing themselves to present a coherent voice and build systematic relationships with governments and international agencies. This is evident at national, local, regional and international levels.

Communities are becoming more involved in educational issues, and national networks and campaigns, notably in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, are gaining more prominence.

Regional networks are emerging or growing. The African Network Campaign on EFA (ANCEFA), the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) and the Arab Resource Collective for Early Childhood Education are some examples.

The Global Campaign for Education has continued to lobby for greater resources for education for all.

A major step forward was made at the annual meeting of the NGO Collective Consultation on Education for All, in Bangkok, in July 2001, where around 100 NGOs agreed to set up a new partnership mechanism for EFA. Its aim: to improve dialogue with UNESCO and other actors and to carry out joint activities in research, capacity building, policy formulation, and monitoring and evaluation.

At a special session on the Involvement of Civil Society in Education for All, convened by UNESCO’s Director-General during the 46th session of the International Conference on Education (Geneva, 5-6 September 2001), education ministers from Ghana, Mozambique, Nepal and Yemen, joined by a civil society organization from three of these countries, presented experiences of State/NGO partnership for EFA. Participants underlined the importance of government leadership in co-ordinating civil society efforts and of establishing mechanisms for systematic dialogue at national and local levels.

From service providers to partners

Now that civil society’s participation in policy-making is written into the Dakar Framework for Action, it remains to ensure that it becomes reality at country level. This will entail broadening policy dialogue and developing more inclusive approaches to EFA policy formulation.

In some countries, scope for civil society organizations to engage fully in EFA may be very limited, and authorities need encouragement to develop more democratic and open political processes.

It is increasingly clear that EFA will only be achieved if it is rooted in a broad-based societal movement and nourished by effective government/civil society partnerships.