The EFA Global Monitoring Report Online Consultation 2008 sought participation on five topics linked to the challenge of making education of good quality available to everyone –children, youth and adults. Questions were posed in each of the topics to motivate the dialogue. A summary of the contributions follows.

Who are the excluded. What are some of the challenges to tackle exclusion.

- In countries where tens of thousands of children are out of school and where families have to pay for their children to have an instruction the real problem is poverty.
- Countries that suffered civil conflicts have left many children in a situation of vulnerability (e.g. former child soldiers, orphans, internally displaced children).
- Direct and indirect costs of education as well as quality and relevance of schooling are important challenges for children engaged in labour.
- Violence in schools: corporal punishment. Aggravated when teachers and students are of different ethno-linguistic backgrounds. Teacher training should include children’s rights, to reduce violence in schools.
- Children with disabilities are oftentimes doubly marginalized: schools are reluctant to enrol or to integrate children with disabilities to regular classes; teachers are not trained to deal with inclusive education; lack of adequate materials in schools; requirements to access special schools are costly or the supply is insufficient; low expectations for what children with disabilities may achieve; lack of awareness among government officials regarding policies for the disabled; general social prejudice.
- Cultural practices, e.g. girls’ dowry, are such strong obstacles keeping girls out of schools that common incentive programmes are not enough.
- Lack of opportunities of employment after schooling act as a disincentive to invest in education.
- Even though children learn more rapidly in their early years, those under 3 years old are among the least covered by educational programmes. Moreover, a poorly developed system of early childhood care and education can contribute to primary school dropout.
- Lack of safety and of adequate school infrastructure for girls contributes to exclude them from schooling.
- Classroom practices and teaching methods are not appropriate for educating in a modern world, e.g. rote learning; practices that do not start from the learner, recognizing their different backgrounds and abilities, contribute to their exclusion from learning.
- Educational reforms implemented without taking into account disadvantages of children in rural areas will only benefit those in urban areas.
Successful strategies, policies or programmes proposed by participants to reach the unreached

- Need for country-specific approaches and for monitoring at the sub-national level, as global indicators cannot adequately convey within country disparities.
- Evaluate the results of different experiences and then disseminate these successful experiences.
- Development of national actions plans addressing learning opportunities for children with disabilities, including adequate infrastructure, teacher training, and differentiated instruction.
- Development of non-formal education strategies. A couple of examples: reaching street children with a programme providing food and shelter and subsequently encouraging them to join formal education; establishing an itinerant library for the communities.
- Private-public collaboration: engaging the civil society/private sector in the formulation of policies and in the implementation within a clearly articulated framework.
- For children engaged in labour, an effective synergy can be found if measures to combat poverty and promote education are linked to increased regulation and enforcement of compulsory schooling.
- Some of the policies that might be relevant for child labourers: support to those that re-enter school by means of bridging or transitional classes, monitoring and home visits.
- Improve primary school teacher standards as a means to reduce violence in schools by, for instance, introducing in competent teachers’ profiles the respect for individual differences and background.
- Mother tongue instruction as a means to improve school performance and retention in primary education. Emphasise the quality aspect of language of instruction.
- Focusing on the most basic aspects of education is key for a programme to succeed, e.g. ensure that the school is open, the environment is safe, or the teacher is in the school.
- Prevention of school failure at the earliest stage: by establishing good quality preschool education, as well as by making available good medical services to perform proper diagnosis of children’s health problems and be able to correct some of them before children advance further in school.
- Some examples of initiatives for inclusive education: itinerant specialist teachers to support children with low vision in Malawi; application of the Index for Inclusion in some Middle Eastern countries, a set of materials to help schools reduce barriers to learning and participation; and the Pakistan National Low Vision programme.
- Piloting of a project of social inclusion in Pakistan is providing with helpful insights as to what are the key factors leading to success; one of the lessons
learned so far include the awareness of how complex is to sensitize the key stakeholders.

- High quality training of teachers for early childhood education focused on identifying the conditions that might lead to literacy failure and improving upon them. Support of teachers by means of in-service training employing distance education strategies.
- Investing in the quality of teachers is even more crucial in the lower grades of primary school, as the first two years are critical, often determining whether a child will remain in school or drop out.
- The social status of teachers needs to be emphasized; often the focus is only on training and motivation is overlooked. When cultural/language background of teachers differ from that of the students, teachers need to be oriented.
- Strengthening of pre-service and in-service training of teachers as well as a greater involvement of local communities and NGOs are seen as means to address the problems of poor teaching quality and teacher absenteeism.
- Deficits in the number of teachers (brought about by several reasons, e.g. spread of HIV/AIDS, abolition of school fees, or the dispersion of population) have been dealt with by hiring retired teachers, para-teachers or community teachers. In several cases, these teachers have been posted to rural, distant schools, with the ensuing difficulties for accessing the schools and resulting in high teacher absenteeism. Lack of training is one factor playing against effectively teaching among para-teachers, but is compounded by the lack of instructional resources, low wages, and poor conditions of service, especially compared to regular teachers.
- Para-teachers or voluntary teachers “are here to stay”, so it would be better to equip them with the necessary qualifications. An example is provided of a program in the state of Jharkhand in India, where para-teachers are encouraged to enrol in an intensive programme with emphasis on practical components and that makes use of distance education means.
- Need to recognise the unique contribution and expertise provided by beneficiaries of the policies. Children as active participants in policy implementation, e.g. acting as role models for other children, bringing in the voice of children that are excluded.

Challenges faced by policy strategies, programmes

- Countries presenting a wide diversity of cultures and languages pose a particular challenge, making it complex, and even inappropriate, to develop common strategies, let alone ‘one-size-fits-all’ strategies.
- Implementation is a key stage in the policy process, which might be enhanced by engaging civil society and thereby reducing the likelihood of disinterest, resistance and ultimately the sabotage of the policy.
• Educational reforms should not imply an abandonment of the government’s social responsibilities.
• As programmes move beyond the norm of formal programmes quality is a key challenge to follow closely.
• Need for successful demonstration models, evaluation of experiences prior to the expansion of a policy strategy.
• Schools exhibit great difficulties to respond to social diversity.
• Early childhood care and education requires cross-sectoral interventions, but these pose challenges for a coordinated government action.
• Absence of clear assignment of responsibilities for early childhood care and education within the government, with several programmes scattered across departments and ministries. As a result there is a lack of coherence in strategies, policy orientation and principles.
• Absence of a clear strategy for inclusive education.
• Factors that may still present a challenge for the effective implementation of a policy of inclusive education: access to information on availability of educational opportunities, lack of physical or human resources, attitudinal barriers, lack of financial resources by households.

Role of the international community

• There is not enough involvement of the private sector in the educational dialogue, sharing worldwide experiences would benefit policy formulation.
• Need to recognize the complementary roles of the international donor community and local civil society organizations. While international agencies have financial resources to support educational programmes and can influence the national government, the role of civil society organisations is very relevant for implementation, as they can have a better grasp of who are the excluded and the challenges and resources at the local level, thereby being able to find other solutions.
• Actual role of international community seen in two fronts: providing financial resources and influence policies. A move towards locally developed plans is seen as relevant to give plans a sense of ownership and improve commitment.
• A need is seen to open up the process by which international agencies contribute to the formulation of policies at the national level.
• The international community should make more explicit its position on issues such as the recruitment policies of the teachers.
• The international community has an advocacy role as well as a role in capacity building (e.g. improving systems management, supporting pilot projects, training professionals, etc.).
• As international funding to basic education increases the international donor community needs to be observant of the risks of corruption in education, which
can take many forms but its burden is on the most vulnerable and marginalised. International agencies have a role in promoting transparency.

- Cooperation and flow of information should also be South-South and South-North.