



## Editorial

## Access to education revisited: Equity, drop out and transitions to secondary school in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa

Access to education for all children is far from being achieved in many low-income countries. Despite gains in enrolments related to Education for All (EFA) programmes, many countries will not achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for universal participation and gender equity in education by 2015. At least 65 million children are out of school according to the most recent enrolment data, but this is a poor indicator of worthwhile participation. If an expanded definition of access is adopted (Lewin, 2007a) that includes regular attendance at least 80% of the time, progression at an appropriate age with no child more than two years overage, and achievement consistent with national attainment targets and within 2 years of the norm for the grade level, and successful completion of a basic education cycle, then many more remain out of school or in school but “silently excluded” – perhaps as many as 300 million. There is therefore a long way to go to universalise access according to any definition that would be acceptable to parents with aspirations for their children that extend beyond a minimalist view of basic education.

Knowledge and skill, and the dispositions and motivations associated with more rather than less education, lie at the heart of development and are both part of the definition of development as well as a means to achieve it. The implication of the commitments made at Jomtien and Dakar by governments and development partners is clear. Not only should all children participate in a full cycle of basic education, but their opportunities to learn and benefit should also be equitably distributed. Participation alone is not sufficient to realise a right to education if what is on offer is highly unequal in quality, effectiveness, and cost. Growth in educational participation, just like growth in an economy can be accompanied by greater or lesser inequality. There is evidence that some patterns of educational expansion may have resulted in adverse changes in the chances of the poorest being enrolled when compared to the richest (Lewin and Sabates, 2011), whereas in other cases equity has improved (Aturupane, 2009). Inequality can be justified if its purpose is to compensate for disadvantage. Where inequality reinforces privilege and results in regressive public subsidy, as is the case where those in the poorest households have the least chance of progressing through an education system, it is unfair, unjust and inequitable (Oketch and Somerset, 2010). Low fee private schools are unlikely to be equity enhancing and often deepen inequality (Lewin, 2007b). The instabilities of life for migrants, nomads, and other displaced groups lead to schooling opportunities that remain very unequally distributed and financed (Smita, 2008; Sharma, 2011).

Most children who are out of school in most countries are drop outs. This fact is sometimes overlooked. As systems evolve and Gross Intake Rates to Grade 1 exceed 80% then it is almost certain that more than half of all children enrol in school, albeit that many are overage. It follows that it becomes increasingly likely that those out of school are drop outs rather than those who never attend, and the latter in most countries are a small minority. The problem of universalising access is then in substantial part one of minimising drop out. Indeed, since tomorrow's out of school children will have largely dropped out from the cohort currently enrolled it makes it more important than ever to understand more about the process of drop out. There are many reasons for children to stop going to school. The most common are lack of interest in school, costs, distance, pregnancy and opportunities to earn income (Hunt, 2008). Drop outs include those whose schooling starts late as a result of overage admission, and those whose progression is delayed by repetition. Overage children have a greater probability of drop out and non completion than those on schedule. They are likely to have lower achievement (Taylor et al., 2010). Drop out is likely amongst those whose schooling is interrupted by periods of absence linked to seasonality, sickness and other household shocks (Hadley, 2009), and it may be associated with inappropriate use of corporal punishment and bullying (Dunne et al., 2010) and disability (Croft, 2010). National policy can shape patterns of drop out but much of what happens is likely to be the result of actions and initiatives at the local level where school and community interact directly (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2009). Where schools are neither child friendly nor child seeking it is unlikely that drop out will fall, even if initial enrolments increase (Reddy and Sinha, 2010).

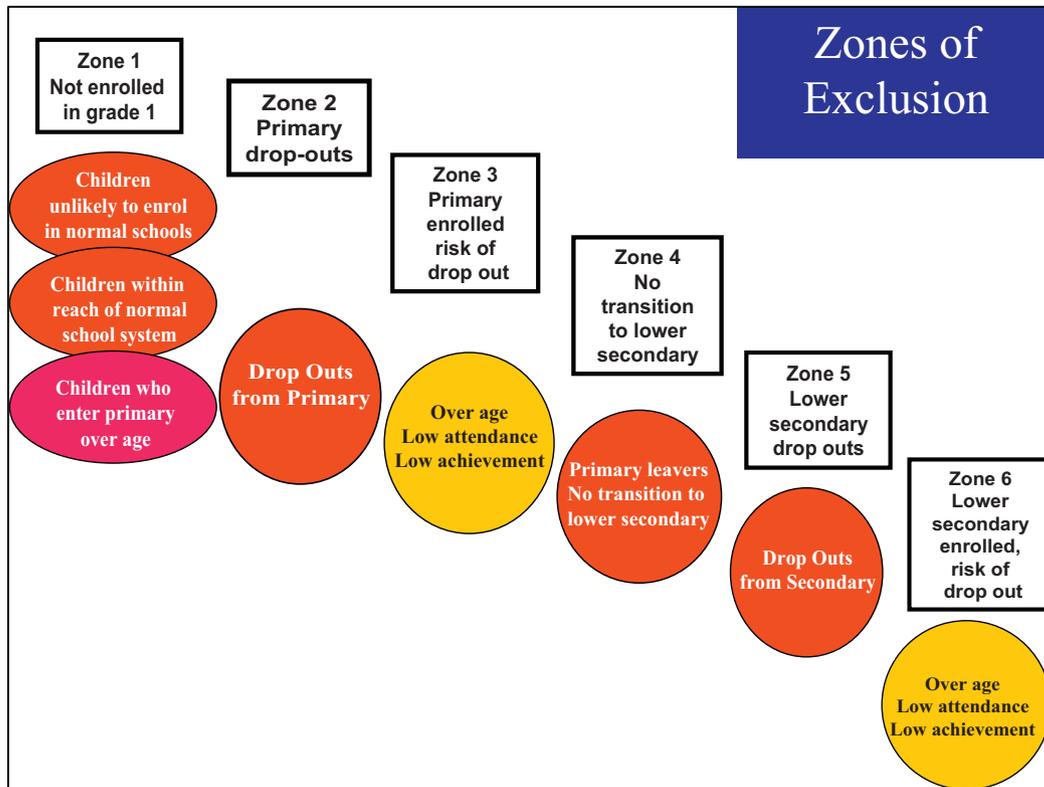
Despite the centrality of access to secondary schooling as a necessary condition to achieve successful universalisation of primary, EFA initiatives have long neglected transitions to and the quality of secondary provision. No countries with low transition rates to secondary ever universalised completion of primary school, nor did they ever achieve gender equality in enrolments. Widely available secondary schooling is necessary in order to produce enough graduates willing and able to become primary teachers. It is also central to meeting the needs of any modernising economy for increased numbers of school leavers with abstract thinking skills and analytic capability (Lewin, 2007c). Much is at stake in getting policy on secondary schooling right because its costs are higher, public subsidy is more likely to be regressive, and the effects of allowing quality to deteriorate are more serious for economic growth and the ability to attract foreign

direct investment. The poor remain at a disadvantage in accessing secondary school as do girls (Akyeampong, 2010).

Development partners have a role to play in accelerating improved access to education. Most obviously they can provide mobilise external support if domestic resources are insufficient. In some of the most fragile states the precursors of development may not be fully in place – security, rule of law, freedom from expropriation, food security, working infrastructure. These must be a first call on resources. In most low enrolment countries where there is the necessary stability to invest, external flows of resources

identifies those who will never go to school (Zone 1), those who start but do not finish (Zone 2), and those who do participate but attend infrequently, are overage, and are low achieving (Zone 3). In addition there are those who fail to transit to secondary school (Zone 4), and those who drop out from secondary (Zone 5), or those who participate and learn little (Zone 6). These zones of exclusion can be illustrated in a chart. CREATE has commissioned work in all these “zones of exclusion” to understand more about access, transitions and equity and illuminate some of the dynamics that shape changing patterns over time.

The CREATE Zones of Exclusion.



can be helpful to increase educational access. But whether access to education improves or deteriorates, and whether gains are sustained, is likely to depend more on domestic political will and the priority attached to educational development in competition with others than on external assistance alone. CREATE has explored aspects of policy and political will and relationships with development partners in a variety of settings (e.g. Little, 2010a,b,c). It has also illuminated how important local systems of school management and community participation are in achieving higher levels of participation (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2009). In the wake of the global financial crises of the last decade fundamental shifts in the direction of some external assistance at least a possibility. In some countries it is timely to look again at whether the orthodoxy of Sector Wide Approaches remains appropriate (Ahmad, 2011). It is therefore more important than ever to seek out the comparative advantages of different types of aid relationships such as those evolving through the Fast Track Initiative to see if they are fit for purpose.

CREATE has developed a model of “zones of exclusion” which locates different populations whose access to education is denied or unlikely to result in the successful completion of a full cycle of basic education. This model (Lewin, 2009, p. 156)

CREATE has supported more than 25 young researchers working on educational access over the last five years. This special collection includes a selection of the work of eight of our CREATE doctoral students. The contributors draw from fieldwork in Ghana, India, Bangladesh, and South Africa and from ideas individually and collectively developed in research programme meetings, supervisions and conferences. The papers address issues across the zones of exclusions, with several offering insights into more than one zone.

The first paper in this collection is by Caine Rolleston and explores changes over time in participation and household welfare which indicate how expanded access has had an impact on equity. Ghana periodically undertakes a national Living Standards Survey and this is now in its fifth round. The data this generates gives extensive insight into patterns of participation across the country and makes it possible to identify the factors associated with different kinds of educational exclusion. The results of the analysis indicate that there have been improvements in participation since the 1990s, but that progress has been uneven and gaps in participation between rich and poor have not declined. Though it is clear that investment in education has had an effect on poverty reduction and that higher levels of education continue to have a

positive effect on household welfare, it is also true that the largest gains apply above the level of basic education. Expanded access has not fundamentally changed the inequities that are linked to greater rates of return for participation at levels above the basic education cycle which remain disproportionately the preserve of the relatively wealthy. Education remains a “positional good” with benefits that accrue more to the rich than the poor. Had Ghana’s economic growth and educational investment been more redistributive since the 1990s there is evidence that the goal of halving poverty would have been achieved already. As it is there is a road left to travel.

In some parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia low price private schools have increased in number, especially where economic liberalisation has relaxed processes of licensing and registration. Some have argued that low price private schools make a significant contribution to increased access to education by the poor but the evidence for this is often partial and incomplete and fails to demonstrate that such schools generate additional school places rather than provide a choice for those who would otherwise go to government school. It is also clear that those households with little or no cash income are unlikely to be able to afford the costs of the fees necessary to support unsubsidised private schooling. In our second paper Joanna Härmä has undertaken a detailed study of low price private schools in one area of Uttar Pradesh. This study covers 13 villages in one administrative block which has a predominantly agricultural economy and low household income. Private, low price schools have developed in this area over the last decade and reflect a real demand for a service that offers more than that available in the poor quality government primary schools. However the analysis shows that it is only households in the top two quintiles of income where the probability of attending private schools begins to increase. Private schools do indeed offer a choice for the relatively wealthy but have little or no impact on the access to education of the poor. The development of private schools has resulted in all richer households opting out of the government schools removing the possibility of influential community voices being heard who have a stake in government schooling. It appears that these developments are neither pro poor nor equitable and that it is clear that the state remains the provider of last resort.

The third paper shifts attention to South Asia and reports on a detailed analysis of schooling opportunity in the slums of Dhaka where a third of the population live. Stuart Cameron has surveyed 1600 households most of which have incomes less than a dollar a day. There are multiple sources of provision of education and about 70% of children were enrolled in some form of primary school, with the largest numbers in government and NGO schools and some in madrasas and private schools. Though the majority of children were experiencing some schooling large numbers drop out before completing the short primary cycle. Household income and distance to school were the most frequent reasons given. The poorest households disproportionately used NGO rather than government schools partly because the total costs to household were likely to be lower. These children were also those most likely to be short in height for their age and to have health issues. Higher costs in government schools are linked to the prevalence of private tuition which is thought to be essential by many parents. The analysis indicates that government falls well short on its promises to deliver rights to education. It remains unclear what the level of commitment of government is to the educational access of the slum population given that many are recent migrants who have uncertain status as city residents. Clearly the educational rights of this population will not be delivered by NGOs alone, and certainly not by private providers who predominantly cater for the less poor.

The fourth contribution changes focus to consider a form of “silent exclusion” from education that is often not visible. Cross border migration involves millions of households and children in

Africa and South Asia. Whole households migrate temporarily or permanently. So also do unaccompanied boys and girls. And when adult migrate children may be left behind with foster care givers. Stephanie Buckland’s paper explores cross border migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa. Large numbers of Zimbabweans have crossed the border into South Africa for a mixture of reasons. Some are economic migrants, others seek political asylum, and some may have both characteristics. Unaccompanied boys may be seeking work and some unaccompanied girls may be being trafficked. Some have the relevant papers and some remain illegal residents in South Africa. Within South Africa all children of school age have right to education. How this applies to illegal migrants is ambiguous as is the locus of responsibility to deliver rights to education. The research identifies different groups of migrants and charts the pathways they follow to gain access to schools and the barriers they encounter. For these children access to education is far from assured, and depends partly on the efficacy of support networks that have developed around the migrant community.

The fifth paper by Eric Ananga develops an analysis of exclusion from education based on long term tracking of a group of dropouts in two locations in the Mfantseman district in the south of Ghana. These communities are dependent on agriculture and fishing and have low rates of school attendance and high rates of drop out. Seasonality is an issue related to the agricultural cycle and the movement of fish. Several patterns of drop out can be identified which illustrate the extent to which drop out is a process not an event. Sporadic drop out occurs when attendance is irregular and can take several forms e.g. days of absence on a fairly regular basis, absence for longer periods interspersed with regular attendance. It may or may not be a precursor to drop out. It is likely to have an adverse effect on learning. Event drop out relates to specific causal events that result in cessation of attendance e.g. family death, migration. Long term drop out are a third category of children who are of school age but have established a livelihood that does not depend on completing schooling. If these children try to return to school they are often very over age and may have difficulties integrating with class mates. Alongside these categories of drop out the sample included both settled and unsettled drop outs. Some of those interviewed still harboured ambitions to return to school. Others were reconciled to never returning and had few regrets about not completing school. This work illustrates the complexities of identifying policy and practices that would reduce drop out which remains high to the extent that overall no more than about half of children in this part of Ghana complete Grade 9 successfully.

The next three papers are concerned with aspects of access to secondary school. Keith Lewin develops an analysis of the prospects for improving access to secondary school Grades 9 and 10 in India. Currently less than 50% of all children succeed in reaching Grade 9 and India is lagging well behind her international competitors, especially China, in the proportion of the school age group who complete secondary schooling successfully. Under the 11th National Plan an initiative has been developed to invest substantially in raising participation to achieve a gross enrolment rate (GER) of at least 75% in all states. *Rastriya Madhyamic Shiksha Abhiyan* (RMSA) is scheduled to achieve this over the next plan period. Most southern states have already achieved GER 75% but in the northern states many have a way to travel. The problem has many dimensions. First, there are issues on the supply side in so far as low enrolment states do not have enough children successfully graduating from Grade 8 to make GER 75% attainable. Progress will depend on the success that *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) has in universalising elementary schooling. Second, much of the gain in participation needed is concentrated in a small number of very large states. Since secondary schooling is a state competence much will depend on the commitment of state governments. Third,

affordability is an important issue since secondary schooling has significant costs to households and most below the second quintile of income are unable to afford to participate. Expanded schooling will have to have low direct costs and will also have to reach out to marginalised groups, especially those in Scheduled Tribes and Castes.

Guarav Siddhu has undertaken research in 17 schools tracking over 700 children through the transition to secondary school to uncover the factors associated with successful promotion. The schools are in the least developed blocks in western Uttar Pradesh. It is clear that location and distance from school, affiliation to marginalised caste groups, being female, and increased costs are all significant in terms of the chances of transiting to secondary school. And these factors interact so that for example distance and costs are more serious obstacles for girls than boys. Costs rise dramatically at secondary level such that the cheapest options multiply expenditure per child 2.5 times. Poorer families tend to have larger numbers of children compounding the problem for them of affording secondary school attendance. And those who attend irregularly, are overage, and repeat classes are less likely to make the transition. Interestingly this study seems to indicate that high scoring girls tend to get more investment from their parents and low scoring girls less to a greater extent than amongst boys. In general Muslim and scheduled caste girls have the least chances of progressing to secondary school. Options identified include needs to expand government school coverage to reach out to communities that only have private secondary schooling available locally. There is also a critical question about how to resolve issues of affordability. Some form of means tested benefit is likely to be more efficient than a flat subsidy, but may not be easy to conceive and implement.

Asayo Ohba's work in Kenya also tracks children through the transition into secondary school. Her study is located in the Makueni district of Eastern Province in Kenya. The district is agricultural with low productivity and yields and low income as a consequence. Its participation rates in secondary schooling are about half the national average despite well known enthusiasm amongst its people to value education. In 2007 after the election the government of Kenya announced the abolition of secondary school fees for all children with the aim of making access to secondary school available to all children. The data reveal that this innovation has not been sufficient to transform participation for several reasons. First it remains the case that many do not reach Grade 8 and complete the primary cycle and thus are not eligible for entry to secondary. Second, fees are only one element in the total cost to household which remains beyond the reach of the poorest. Third, the perceptions and realities of the opportunity costs and benefits of secondary schooling have not changed sufficiently to induce poorer school leavers to participate. This case study shows that, at least for the sample population, abolishing fees was not sufficient to ensure their participation since costs remained substantial. Fee abolition was regressive rather than pro-poor since it was predominantly those who had been paying fees who benefited.

The final contribution to this collection is by Victoria Turrent who has developed a study of the evolution of the "Fast Track Initiative" which seeks to accelerate progress towards universal access to primary education. The FTI has taken some time to develop and disburse significant funds and has experienced various difficulties. Not least amongst these is that the states where its assistance is most likely to be needed are the most fragile states with the least capacity to respond to the various conditions necessary to qualify. Thus for example the requirement for credible plans can be seen as over demanding in fragile states with very limited capacity and unstable institutions which lack policy continuity and implementation capacity. It is also possible that

the ambition to develop a funding mechanism that would respond to the special needs of those furthest from reaching goals to universalise access to education needed more thinking through. The willingness of development partners to pool resources and accept the risks of investment in fragile states was easy to assume but more difficult to realise. The paper argues that there is a continuing under investment in education in fragile states because the architecture of aid has not successfully recognised the needs for context specific arrangements that respond to different needs and priorities, and because fiduciary requirements are often unrealistic. Both long and short route accountability are needed interpreted in ways that make disbursement possible. And the straightjacket of an FTI closely linked to the Millennium Development Goals for education needs to be readdressed to locate the issues around universalising primary schooling within a broader sector view and macro-economic set of realities that will shape achievement of goals and sustainability of achievements.

In conclusion it is clear that achieving universal access to basic education, especially if this is conceived of in terms of an expanded vision of which embraces worthwhile learning, equity and opportunities to transit to higher levels of education, remains very challenging for many low income countries. Sometime between 2011 and 2015 the MDGs will be redefined in the light of the realities of changing patterns of participation and attainment. The opportunity is to build on what is known about failures and successes since the Dakar Conference in 2000 and address the kind of persistent exclusions and inequities in educational access that the papers in this special issue highlight.

More research papers can be found on the CREATE website [www.create-rpc.org](http://www.create-rpc.org) and in special issues of Comparative Education (vol. 45(2), 2009), Prospects (vol. 40(3)) and the Journal of Educational Policy (in press 2011).

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