

## BACKGROUND NOTE

### 2011 e-discussion on *Education: Closing the Gap* Annual Ministerial Review of United Nations Economic and Social Council

#### I. THE 2011 ANNUAL MINISTERIAL REVIEW

The [Annual Ministerial Review](#) (AMR) is a function of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) mandated at the 2005 World Summit<sup>1,25</sup>. Its purpose is to assess annual progress made towards the [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs) and the implementation of other goals and targets agreed at the major UN conferences and summits over the past 15 years, which constitute the United Nations Development Agenda. See Annex I for further details.

Each year the Annual Ministerial Review focuses on a specific theme within the UN Development Agenda. This year's theme is "*Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to education*".

In addition to assessing progress on the MDGs, the AMR contributes to scaling up and accelerating action to realize the broader UN Development Agenda. At the 2011 AMR – to be held in July in Geneva – the report of the Secretary-General will provide a succinct overview of progress in education. The report is expected to highlight the critical role of education in economic and social development; address the urgency of sustaining progress in education outcomes in times of global crises; examine the need for education policies that not only strengthen education systems but also ensure policy coherence across sectors; make the case for safeguarding aid to education and aid effectiveness; discuss widening the circle of education partnerships and enhancing their impact; and introduce a number of emerging and future education challenges. The report will also include a number of recommendations for consideration by ECOSOC.

The 2011 AMR process is anticipated to lead to a Ministerial Declaration and concrete initiatives that will build upon and advance work being undertaken in education.

#### II. OBJECTIVE AND STRUCTURE OF THE E-DISCUSSION

The AMR e-discussion is an annual event that engages experts, practitioners and policy-makers from various regions and stakeholder groups in a global dialogue on that year's theme. It provides a vehicle to develop recommendations for UN Member States to help strengthen their efforts to address some of the most significant challenges in education. It also serves to provide the intergovernmental process – especially ECOSOC – with constructive ideas about efforts to reduce inequities in education worldwide. Contributions made by e-discussion participants will be synthesised into an outcome document and channelled into various parts of the AMR process as appropriate, including the report of the Secretary-General, the regional and national review processes and the global review at the ECOSOC Substantive Session. The outcome document will also be made available online.

The 2011 e-discussion *Education: Closing the Gap* will be organized into three parts around the topics (1) Quality in education; (2) Access to education; and (3) Innovation in education. Expert guest moderators will guide and enrich the discussion. The e-discussion will be hosted by [MDGNet](#) and will run from Tuesday, 1 February 2011 to Friday, 4 March 2011.

As the 2011 AMR theme is broad, a series of questions have been formulated to elicit your views and

teacher remuneration, absenteeism and incentives require further analysis of good practice in teacher training and management.

E. A number of actions can promote improved quality in education. International testing of learning outcomes and skills has encouraged better data collection on learning and improved international comparability of learning achievement. Greater transparency and accountability in education services are also necessary for improving quality, whether via international testing or enhanced access to data on education governance. Perhaps most importantly, strong political will is often an important determinant for quality, along with the amount of financial resources devoted to education. Putting in place the right incentives can help improve the functioning of key institutions. It can help enhance the involvement of teachers, parents and local officials in decision-making processes, improve resource allocation, and improve human resources management.

#### **IV. E-DISCUSSION PART TWO: ACCESS TO EDUCATION**

##### *Questions*

1. Early childhood care and education can mitigate social disadvantage and lead to improved learning achievement. How can integrated approaches to education and child and maternal health care be targeted more effectively to children from the poorest households?
2. The benefits of educating women and girls have been widely documented. What concrete steps can be taken to get girls into school and keep them there?

A. While much progress has been made on achieving universal primary education since the [Education For All](#) (EFA) Dakar Framework for Action was agreed in 2000, an aggregate analysis hides the large and often persistent inequalities, disparities and combined forms of exclusion that continue to leave tens of millions out of school. Low levels of enrolment are concentrated not only in specific regions but also in certain segments of the population. Girls in particular are being left behind. [Recent UNESCO analysis](#) demonstrates that 60 percent of countries face gender disparities in primary and secondary education and as many as half will not achieve the goal of gender parity in education by 2015<sup>3</sup>. In addition, progress towards other EFA goals - in particular the targets on early child care and education (ECCE) and adult literacy - has been particularly slow. Access expansion must be equity-based, complemented by targeted interventions to reach marginalized groups.

B. Exclusion from education is rooted in deeply ingrained social, economic and political processes, and unequal power relationships. While poverty and gender continue to thwart progress on inclusive education, other forms of stigmatization – such as minority ethnic and language status, disability and HIV/AIDS – continue to keep millions of children and youth from attending school. In addition, conflict is a particularly potent source of marginalization worldwide. Over half of the children

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<sup>3</sup> UNESCO, Institute for Statistics (2010) *Global Education Digest 2010: Comparing Education Statistics across the World*.

currently out of school live in conflict-affected fragile states, based on analysis from [a recent report by Save the Children](#)<sup>4</sup>.

C. According to UNESCO's [2010 EFA Global Monitoring Report](#), many of the measures which have proven to be effective in reducing inequalities are affordable, even in the poorest countries. The most successful of these have included: lowering financial barriers through the elimination of school fees, bringing schools closer to marginalized communities, developing second chance programmes, improving the learning environment in disadvantaged schools, enforcing laws against discrimination, providing incentives

the long-term poverty reduction efforts. One important example is the positive implications of women's and girls education for their health and the health of their families. Also, the important role which education can play in promoting a transition towards a more sustainable consumption and production pattern is now also widely recognized. This interdependence needs to be reflected in stronger intersectoral coordination and more joined up policy making in government.

C. While national governments have primary responsibility for delivering education services, and ensuring equity and quality, non-governmental (including faith-based) organizations, private and civil society groups are often making a significant contribution to the achievement of the education goals. It will be important to harness further those energies both at the country and global levels. It would also be worthwhile to understand better the comparative advantages each organizational type brings to education financing and service-delivery. This is essential to improving coordination among different

## ANNEX I

### The ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review

At the 2005 World Summit, leaders mandated<sup>5</sup> the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to hold an annual ministerial substantive review (AMR) to assess the progress made towards the MDGs and the implementation of the other goals and targets agreed at the major UN conferences and summits over the past 15 years, which constitute the United Nations Development Agenda (UNDA). The first AMR was held in Geneva on 3-4 July 2007.

**Format.** The AMR takes the form of a two-day ministerial-level meeting during the ECOSOC high-level segment in July. It consists of:

a *global review* of the United Nations development agenda for systematic review and monitoring of progress made in the implementation of the UNDA,

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