

2

The great schooling expansion—and those it has left behind

In 1945, when Indonesia declared independence, only 5 percent of its people could read and write. In 2015, 95 percent could (UIS 2016).

In Nepal in 1981, only one in five adults were literate. In 2015, nearly two-thirds were (UIS 2016).

Over the last 50 years, schooling has expanded dramatically in most low- and middle-income countries. In some countries, this expansion has been at historically unprecedented rates. Another pattern is the rapid expansion of postprimary education, though many young people remain excluded from even primary education. So even in countries with strong schooling expansions, exclusions due to poverty, gender, ethnicity, disability, and location persist. Fragile and postconflict countries also remain glaring exceptions to the global boom in schooling.

Most children have access to basic education

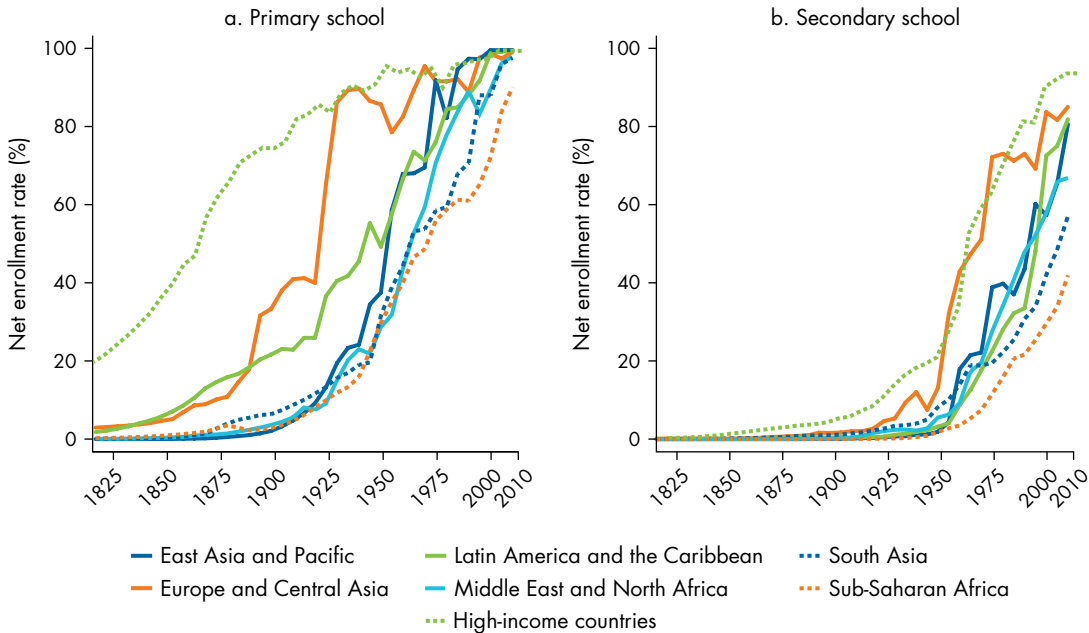
Schooling has expanded almost universally. In 1970 the gross primary enrollment rate was 68 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa and 47 percent in South Asia. By 2010, that rate was above 100 percent in both regions.¹ These numbers reflect the progress made in nearly all countries regardless of regime type, rate of economic growth, or quality of governance.² As a result, most children today enroll in primary school—and every new cohort of young people spends more time in school than previous ones.³

The recent expansion in schooling in low-income countries is especially remarkable in its scope and speed. The years of schooling completed by the average adult in the developing world more than tripled between 1950 and 2010—from 2.0 to 7.2 years.⁴ This rate is historically unprecedented. In Zambia, secondary enrollment increased by nearly 75 percentage points between 2000 and 2010, faster than the rate experienced by any high-income country during its fastest phase of secondary expansion.⁵ It took the United States 40 years—from 1870 to 1910—to increase girls' enrollments from 57 percent to 88 percent. Morocco achieved a similar increase in just 11 years.⁶ Accordingly, the enrollment gaps between low- and high-income countries are closing. By 2008 the average low-income country was enrolling students in primary school at nearly the same rate as the average high-income country (figure 2.1). Despite these gains, there is a large stock of uneducated adults—322 million in South Asia alone (figure 2.2).

Previously marginalized groups, especially girls, are now much more likely to start primary school. Between 2000 and 2014, the number of out-of-school children fell by about 112 million.⁷ At the same time,

Figure 2.1 School enrollments have shot up in developing countries

Net enrollment rates, by country group (1820–2010)



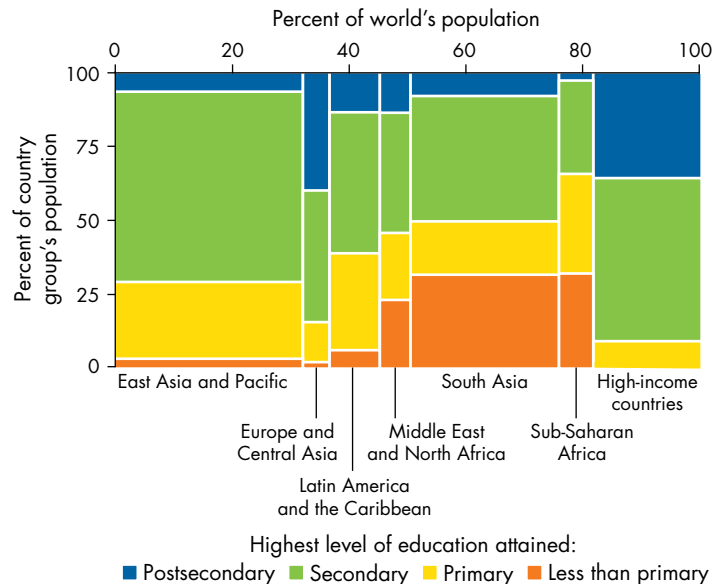
Source: WDR 2018 team, using data from Lee and Lee (2016). Data at http://bit.do/WDR2018-Fig_2-1.

the share of girls enrolled in basic education reached a historic high.⁸ In primary and secondary schools in the developing world, the ratio of girls to boys jumped from 0.84 to 0.96 between 1991 and 2007.⁹ Indeed, girls outnumber boys in secondary school in 38 developing countries (out of 121 for which data are available).¹⁰ Gender parity, however, has yet to be achieved; 62 million girls between the ages of 6 and 15 years are still out of school,¹¹ with the highest concentrations in West and South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.¹² Although many girls start primary school, their likelihood of completing it remains low in some countries. By 2014 the primary enrollment rate of girls in low-income countries was at 78 percent, but their completion rate was only 63 percent.¹³

The strongest schooling expansions have occurred at the primary level, leading to a sharp increase in the demand for secondary education. Secondary enrollment rates have risen above 50 percent in every region except parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. But at that level there remain big gaps between low- and high-income countries, especially for completion. In 2016 the secondary completion rate was 96 percent in high-income Organisation for Economic Cooperation and

Figure 2.2 Most of the world's population with less than a primary education is in South Asia, but rates are similar in Sub-Saharan Africa

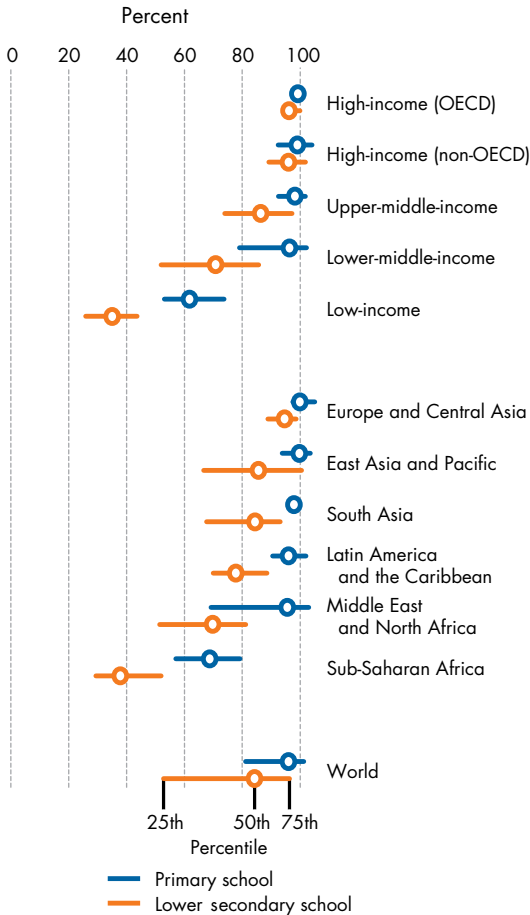
Stock of educational attainment (ages 15–64), by country group (2010)



Source: WDR 2018 team, using data from Lee and Lee (2016). Data at http://bit.do/WDR2018-Fig_2-2.

Figure 2.3 National income is correlated with the gap between primary and lower secondary completion rates

Distribution of completion rates across countries, by country group and level of schooling



Source: WDR 2018 team, using data from UIS (2016). Data at http://bit.do/WDR2018-Fig_2-3.

Note: Geographic regions exclude high-income countries. The data presented are the latest available, by country, for the period 2010–16. Completion rates include students whose age exceeds the official age group for a particular education level, and so the rate may exceed 100 percent.

Development (OECD) countries, but only 35 percent in low-income countries (figure 2.3).¹⁴

Developing countries are following a very different path to schooling expansion than developed countries did. Low-income countries are leapfrogging the progress experienced by high-income countries—with strong expansion in postprimary education even while primary education remains inaccessible to many young people (figure 2.4).

Poverty, gender, ethnicity, disability, and location explain most remaining schooling disparities

Mawut, a refugee from South Sudan, lived in a refugee camp in Kenya for years so he could finish primary school. “In 2010 my sister [decided to return] to Sudan and I decided not to follow her because I knew if I did so, that would be the end of my education. I went to Kakuma Refugee Camp with my brother, where I completed the two remaining years of my primary course. I passed very well despite the problems that I had experienced” (Kelland 2016).

Nadya is a 25-year-old from Mashkhal, a remote district in southeastern Afghanistan. “I am the only literate woman in this heavily populated province working outside home and, more important, the only female teacher in this traditional province. . . . When the elders of Mashkhal found out I was literate . . . [they asked] my husband if I could volunteer teaching their daughters, mostly those older girls who were not allowed to be taught by a male teacher” (IRIN 2003).

Conflict-affected countries remain a glaring exception to the global schooling expansion (box 2.1). The net primary enrollment rate in conflict-affected South Sudan was 41 percent in 2011; the enrollment rate in neighboring Ethiopia was 78 percent.¹⁵ Conflict-affected countries are home to more than a third of out-of-school children.¹⁶ Children in these countries are less likely to complete school—30 percent less likely for primary, 50 percent less likely for lower secondary.¹⁷ They have higher dropout rates, lower completion rates, higher gender disparities, lower literacy levels, and disproportionately high out-of-school numbers.¹⁸ Conflict can also erase past gains. The Syrian Arab Republic had achieved universal primary enrollment in 2000. But in 2013, 1.8 million children were out of school due to conflict.¹⁹

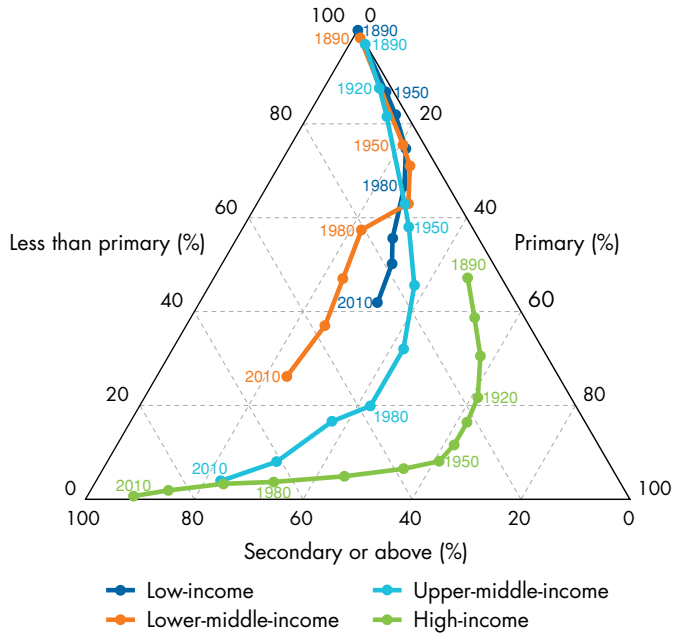
Exclusions based on poverty, location, gender, and ethnicity persist (figure 2.5). In 2014 an estimated 61 million primary school-age children and 202 million secondary school-age youth—with a disproportionate share from poor households—were out of school.²⁰ Only about a quarter of the poorest children in low-income countries—compared with three-quarters in the richest—complete primary school.²¹

These gaps are even larger when disaggregating by gender, where the double exclusions from gender and poverty mean that only 25 percent of the poorest girls in low-income countries complete primary school.²² In some contexts, ethnicity can be an important predictor of education access. In 2011 only 10 percent of adult Roma had completed secondary education in Romania, compared with 58 percent of non-Roma living nearby.²³ Children of indigenous groups in Latin America are more than twice as likely as other children to be working.²⁴

Children from the poorest families are less likely to start school. Those who do start school are more likely to drop out early, though at varying rates across countries. In some countries, such as Mali and Pakistan, the effect of poverty on education levels is already visible at the start of primary school. In Indonesia and Peru, gaps emerge later (figure 2.6). In nearly every country, parents' wealth and education attainment are the main determinants of their children's education.²⁵ On average, in developing countries there is a 32 percentage point gap between the chances of children in the poorest and richest quintiles completing primary school—with these wealth-related inequalities increasing in 10 of 25 such countries for which data are available.²⁶ The poorest people are the most affected by any marginal increase in or contraction of public spending on education.²⁷ Not surprisingly, then, making school more

Figure 2.4 Lower-income countries are rapidly expanding secondary education at a time when much of their population has not yet completed primary school

Evolution in the stock of educational attainment (ages 15–64), by present-day income group (1890–2010)



Source: WDR 2018 team, using data from Lee and Lee (2016). Data at http://bit.do/WDR2018-Fig_2-4.

Box 2.1 Access denied: The effects of fragility, conflict, and violence

Children living in the most fragile contexts make up about 20 percent of the world's primary school-age population. Yet they constitute about 50 percent of those not in school, an increase from 42 percent in 2008.^a Children in fragile states are up to three times more likely to be out of school than those living in nonconflict contexts, and they are far more likely to drop out of primary school before completion. Even when fragility, conflict, and violence do not directly disrupt access, they can affect learning by changing the pedagogical experience, such as through lack of teachers and resources or trauma from violence. Conflict tends to exacerbate exclusions based on ethnicity, religion, or gender.

Education systems can exacerbate conflict through, for example, ethnic, religious, or gender stereotyping in

textbooks. Other manifestations include the singular use of a nonindigenous language as part of noninclusive “nation building,” the denial of education to marginalized groups, the manipulation of history for political purposes, and the use of geography lessons to promote a particular ideological view.

Displaced children face significant obstacles to learning. Only one out of every two refugee children has access to primary education; a refugee child is five times more likely than the average child to be out of school.^b Education for these vulnerable children can provide a sense of normalcy and structure, with high returns.^c But the challenge of equipping these children with the necessary skills and knowledge has often fallen to host governments, some

(Box continues next page)

Box 2.1 Access denied: The effects of fragility, conflict, and violence (continued)

of which are already struggling to provide quality education for their own populations. Lebanon, for example, has increased the size of its public education system by almost 50 percent since 2011, largely because of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. In Lebanon, refugees make up almost a third of the total enrollment in education.^d

In addition to conflict and violence at the societal level, school-level violence hinders learning. Physical and psychological violence are common forms of so-called discipline, with students in many parts of the world routinely subjected to corporal punishment. Across three major

cities in one large country, for example, more than half of all students had been subjected to some form of violent punishment at school.^e One-quarter of the children who were physically punished said they sustained injuries as a result. Children already discriminated against based on disability, poverty, caste, class, ethnicity, or sexual orientation are more likely than their peers to suffer corporal punishment. In some contexts, sexual violence in schools is also an issue—for example, authority figures may abuse their power by demanding sex in return for better grades or for waiving school fees.

Source: Commins (2017).

- a. UNESCO (2013).
- b. UNHCR (2016).
- c. Burde and others (2015).
- d. World Bank (2016a).
- e. NCCM and UNICEF (2015).

affordable—both in terms of defraying direct costs and compensating for opportunity costs—increases the school participation of children from poorer families.²⁸

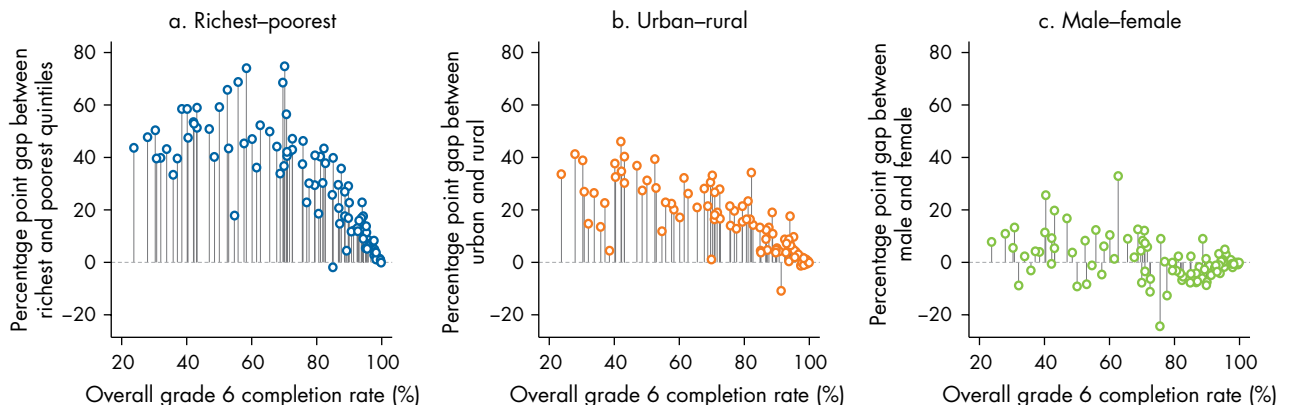
Globally, girls are twice as likely as boys never to start school, which results in lower school completion rates.²⁹ In Sub-Saharan Africa, poor rural girls are seven times less likely than nonpoor urban boys to complete school; less than 1 in 20 of these girls is on

track to complete secondary school.³⁰ Even in regions where gender parity has been achieved at the primary level, such as North Africa and West Asia, gender disparities in enrollment exist at the lower secondary school level and become more pronounced in upper secondary school.³¹

Gender reinforces other disadvantages. It often compounds disadvantages related to socioeconomic

Figure 2.5 School completion is higher for richer and urban families, but gender gaps are more context-dependent

Gaps in grade 6 completion rates (percent) for 15- to 19-year-olds, by wealth, location, and gender

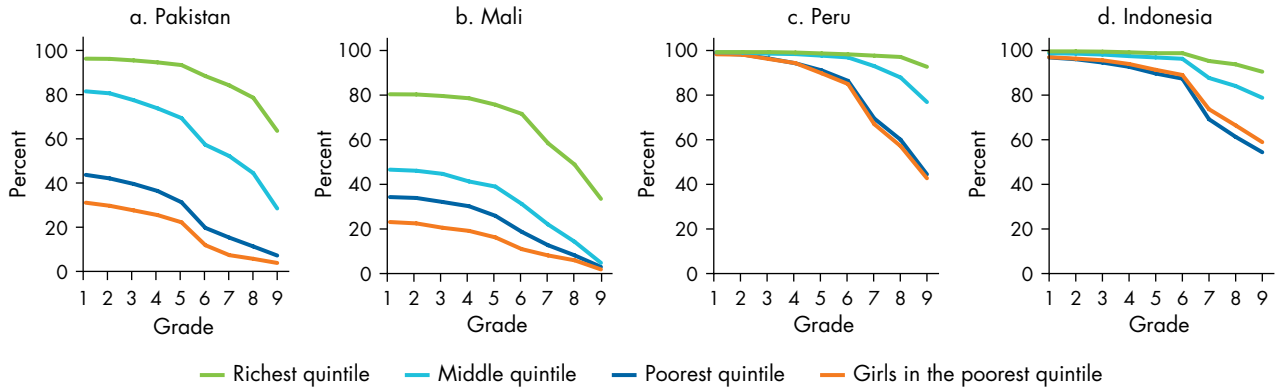


Source: WDR 2018 team, using data from Filmer (2016). Data at http://bit.do/WDR2018-Fig_2-5.

Note: The data presented are the latest available by country, 2005–14. Each vertical line indicates the size and direction of the gap for a country.

Figure 2.6 Multiple exclusions: Girls from poor households often have the lowest rates of education attainment

Percentage of youth (ages 15–19) who have completed each grade, by wealth quintile and gender, selected countries (2012)



Source: WDR 2018 team, using data from U.S. Agency for International Development’s Demographic and Health Surveys for 2012 (<http://www.dhsprogram.com>). Data at http://bit.do/WDR2018-Fig_2-6.

status, ethnicity, location, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age, and race.³² Across 44 countries, boys in the poorer half of the population were almost 75 percent more likely to complete grade 5 than girls; by contrast, in the richer half of the population the boys’ advantage was less than 20 percent.³³ Nearly 70 percent of all girls who were not enrolled in primary school in 2006 came from socially excluded groups.³⁴

Children with disabilities face substantial obstacles to education—and substantially lower participation in school.³⁵ In Burkina Faso, having a disability increases the probability of a child never attending school by about two times.³⁶ Even in countries with high overall primary school enrollments, children with disabilities are still significantly less likely to attend school. In Moldova, 97 percent of children without disabilities between the ages of 7 and 15 years are enrolled in primary school, whereas only 58 percent of children with disabilities are in school.³⁷ At the same time, quality education for children with disabilities has significant economic and social returns. Across 12 developing countries, each additional year of schooling for people with a disability decreased their probability of being in the poorest two quintiles by between 2 and 5 percentage points.³⁸

For poor parents, schooling requires trade-offs

Millions of poor parents make difficult choices about whether to educate their children. This cost-benefit assessment—where costs include both the direct cost of school and the opportunity cost of a child’s time

outside it—determines their children’s enrollment, grade completion, and learning outcomes.³⁹ In some contexts, this calculus might involve sending just some—but not all—children to school. For example, only about a quarter of rural households in Burkina Faso enroll all their children in school.⁴⁰ Cutting the cost of schooling, therefore, significantly raises school participation by children from poorer families.⁴¹ The removal of direct costs to schooling through universal primary education in Uganda increased primary enrollment by over 60 percent and lowered cost-related dropouts by over 33 percentage points.⁴² In Malawi, free primary education increased enrollment by half, favoring girls and poor people.⁴³

For some poor households, distance to the nearest school is a predictor of school participation, especially where social norms or safety concerns make it difficult for children—particularly girls—to travel far from home.⁴⁴ In Indonesia, each school built for every 1,000 children increased education by an average of 0.12 years.⁴⁵ But school availability matters most when starting from a point of low availability, and school construction by itself can only do so much.⁴⁶

Perceived returns, whether in the labor market or in realms such as the marriage “market,” often determine how willing poor parents are to send their children to school.⁴⁷ Thus the demand for education is likely to be lower if parents underestimate the returns to education.⁴⁸ Parents might also misunderstand how the returns to education vary by level. If they believe the returns from secondary education are significantly higher than the returns from primary, it might make more sense to focus on sending

their brightest child to secondary school rather than sending all their children to primary school.⁴⁹ In the face of extreme poverty and perceived low returns to schooling, poor people might restrict their overall aspirations for education.⁵⁰

Parents' perceptions about whether their children are learning affect their decisions about whether to continue schooling. In most low-income countries, students who have to repeat grades or who exceed the average age of their classmates by several years are more likely to drop out before completing primary school.⁵¹ In the Philippines, a child's perceived educational ability is a key determinant of whether parents choose to keep him or her in school, or in the workplace instead.⁵² Similarly, adolescents in Burkina Faso are far more likely to be enrolled when they score high on an intelligence test, but much less likely if their sibling scores higher.⁵³

When parents perceive the education available to be of low quality, it also affects their choices about schooling.⁵⁴ Although parental perceptions of school quality depend on a variety of factors—from the physical condition of the school to teacher punctuality—student learning outcomes are a critical aspect.⁵⁵ Holding student ability and achievement constant,

families in the Arab Republic of Egypt could differentiate schools by their quality of education—and students attending lower-quality schools were more likely to drop out.⁵⁶ Indeed, parents seem willing to bypass lower-quality public schools in favor of higher-quality, more remote public ones, or better-quality private ones with higher fees.⁵⁷

* * *

Worldwide, parents and students have incredible faith in the power of education. People everywhere know that education can transform lives, including the lives of their children. The rapid growth in schooling in poor rural areas around the world is indicative of this demand.⁵⁸ Almost all parents say they want their children to complete school—even parents who did not attend school themselves.⁵⁹ The last 50 years have generated high hopes of strong returns to education and a great drive toward universal school enrollment. But much remains to be done. Achieving this promise means addressing gaps in school participation and ensuring that education leads to learning. As chapter 3 shows, the great schooling expansion has not translated into commensurate gains in learning. Attention must now shift to ensuring learning for all.

Notes

1. UIS (2016). Gross enrollment includes students whose age exceeds the official age group for a particular education level, and so the rate may exceed 100 percent.
2. Pritchett (2013).
3. United Nations (2015).
4. Barro and Lee (2013).
5. WDR 2018 team calculations using data from Lee and Lee (2016).
6. World Bank (2011b).
7. UNESCO (2016).
8. UNESCO (2015).
9. World Bank (2011a).
10. World Bank (2017). Data used are the latest available between 2010 and 2015.
11. World Bank (2016b).
12. UNESCO (2015).
13. UIS (2016).
14. UIS (2016).
15. World Bank (2016c).
16. UNESCO (2016).
17. Education Commission (2016).
18. UNESCO (2011).
19. UIS and UNESCO (2015).
20. UNESCO (2016).
21. UIS (2016).
22. UIS (2016).
23. World Bank (2014).
24. López-Calva and Patrinos (2015).
25. Alderman, Orazem, and Paterno (2001); Bailey and Dynarski (2011); Lincove (2015).
26. Education Commission (2016).
27. Lanjouw and Ravallion (1999).
28. Kremer and Holla (2009); Orazem and King (2008).
29. Education Commission (2016).
30. Education Commission (2016).
31. UNESCO (2016).
32. Kabeer (2015); Lewis and Lockheed (2006).
33. Filmer (2005).
34. Lockheed (2010).
35. World Bank (2007).
36. Kobiané and Bougma (2009).
37. Mete (2008).
38. Filmer (2008).
39. Becker (2009); Glewwe (2002); Hanushek and Woessmann (2008).
40. Akresh and others (2012).
41. Kremer and Holla (2009); Orazem and King (2008).
42. Deininger (2003).
43. Bentaouet-Kattan and Burnett (2004).
44. Burde and Linden (2012).
45. Duflo (2001).
46. Filmer (2007).

47. Behrman, Rosenzweig, and Taubman (1994); Jensen (2010); Nguyen (2008).
48. Banerjee and Duflo (2011); Murnane and Ganimian (2014).
49. Banerjee and Duflo (2011).
50. Dalton, Ghosal, and Mani (2016); Genicot and Ray (2014).
51. Glick and Sahn (2010); UNESCO and UNICEF (2015).
52. Bacolod and Ranjan (2008).
53. Akresh and others (2012).
54. Banerjee, Jacob, and Kremer (2000); Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2005).
55. Alderman, Orazem, and Paterno (2001); Andrabi, Das, and Khwaja (2008); Tooley and Dixon (2007).
56. Hanushek, Lavy, and Hitomi (2006).
57. Andrabi, Das, and Khwaja (2008); He and Giuliano (2017).
58. Tooley and Dixon (2006).
59. Mukerji and Walton (2013).

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