

## **Education for All Children by 2015: Mere Rhetoric or Reality in Swaziland?**

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#### **Abstract**

Despite the commitment of world countries to achieving Education For All (EFA) by 2015, many of them, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, will not meet this target. Will Swaziland achieve this target? This paper analysed the rhetoric on EFA, and also used recent statistics to determine reality of whether or not the country is on track to achieving EFA by 2015. The analyses used gross and net enrolment ratios (GERs and NERs) by region and gender.

The results showed that Swaziland has impressive GERs and NERs. The NERs are static and lower than 100%, indicating that EFA has not been achieved, and that the country is not progressing. They further show gender differences as the NERs for females are lower than those for males, indicating that more males are attending school. The country needs to introduce reforms, eliminate barriers, and institute a “Big Push” to achieve the EFA goals.

#### **Keywords**

Universal primary education, education for all, Swaziland, gross enrolment ratio, net enrolment ratio, primary school enrolments, gender differences, regional differences.

# Education For All Children by 2015: Mere Rhetoric or Reality in Swaziland

## 1. Introduction

Is Swaziland on track to meeting the Education For All (EFA) goals, it signed up for, by 2015? Or is the talk on achieving EFA by 2015 mere rhetoric and not reality? In 1990, countries of the world, including Swaziland, attended a landmark event, a meeting organized by the United Nations in Jomtien, Thailand and they committed themselves to the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Two of these eight MDGs, notably Goal number two and number three, covered education. Ten years later, in 2000, at the World Forum on Education for All (EFA) in Dakar, Senegal, the Dakar Framework for Action was adopted by 164 Governments (including Swaziland), and they committed themselves to expanding educational opportunities for children, young people and adults and achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) for all by 2015 (United Nations, 2006; Herfkens, 2002). This led many Governments, particularly in developing countries, where provision of education was very low, and the size and complexity of the challenge greatest (Department for International Development, 2001) to make concerted efforts to expand their education systems and improve the quality of their education so as to achieve this set target. This commitment to EFA became the *lingua franca* of the politicians and Governments, and continues to drive the provision of educational opportunities, international discussions, dialogue and action, and the levels and patterns of aid to education, and the planning and investments in education (Parker, 2008).

The Kingdom of Swaziland joined the other world countries and committed itself to achieving EFA by 2015. A key question that arises is: following its commitment, is the country on course to achieving the EFA goals and targets by 2015? Are all four regions of the country on equal level in their development to achieving EFA, or are there any regions that are lagging behind? Are both males and females on the same level towards achieving EFA, or is there a gender that is lagging behind? And, does the rhetoric on EFA match the Reality? Answers to these questions are presently lacking and this does not help the country in planning its education system properly as it does not know if the current rates of development of the education system will lead the country to achieve its targets or not.

The situation on the ground seems contradictory. While some Ministry of Education and Training officials and donors claim that EFA has been achieved in the country, or is very close to being achieved, many ordinary people in the country still see many primary school age children not attending school because of many reasons: poor children who do not have money to pay school fees or the top up fees, who do not have money to pay for transport to school and for uniforms, who do not have schools within walking distance, children that are kept at home by parents to assist them, e.g. look after cattle or act as maids, schools that are full and reject pupils who apply for admission, orphaned and vulnerable children with no one to support them, etc. The World Bank (2006) in its study on Swaziland Achieving Education For All, indicates that "Swaziland is still far from the EFA goal of universal completion of 10-year basic education" (p. 5). This study analyses the available statistical data to re-examine this widely held assumptions, and provides new estimates of the recent gross enrolment ratios (GERs) and net enrolment ratios (NERs). It further provides these ratios disaggregated by region and gender. Again it shows whether it is just talk by politicians and

policy makers on achieving EFA or the data (or their action) show progress towards achieving EFA. It will therefore assist the country to know its exact status on achieving EFA and whether or not the current rates of growth will enable the country to achieve EFA by 2015.

The author notes that a majority of studies on the achievement of EFA goals report the situation at the national level and not by region and/or gender. Of course what happens at the national level is a result of what happens in the country's regions, and also reflect the country's level of equal opportunities between males and females. While statistics on gross and net enrolment ratios of countries are easily available and often quoted, there is dearth of information and knowledge of how these differ from region to region within a country and also how they differ between the sexes. This study, using data from Swaziland, therefore takes a different route from other similar studies, and attempts to fill this yawning gap in information by determining whether all regions and gender groups in the country have similar gross and net enrolment ratios or not. This information assists policy makers to see if there are any disparities between regions and sexes and determine which group is lagging behind, and then focus on formulating and implementing suitable policies to address these inequalities and thereby hasten the achievement of the EFA goal. Given the centrality of ideals of equal educational opportunity and access to schooling, not only in Swaziland but in many other developing countries, this article will be a welcomed contribution to addressing these important issues.

## **2. Objectives**

The major purpose of this study is to assist the country to plan its education system appropriately, and ensure that it has adequate information to make appropriate policies to put in place to enable the country to achieve the EFA targets by 2015.

The specific objectives are:

1. The Reality - to analyse statistical data, that is available at the Central Statistical Office (demography unit) on the school age population and also data that is available in the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) on primary school enrolments by region, single age and gender to determine if the country is on course to achieving the EFA targets by 2015 or not.
2. The Rhetoric - to find out from existing Government pronouncements, documents, publications, press reports and speeches on what is said as regards the achievement of EFA in Swaziland.
3. To compare the four regions of the country and the two sexes to determine if there are any regional and gender differences in their achievement of EFA.
4. To compare the Rhetoric with the Reality on the ground, and make recommendations for these to match.

### 3. Methodology

The main focus of the study was to do a quantitative analysis of primary school children's access to education, and determine whether the EFA targets have been reached or not, and if not, find out if they will be reached by 2015, using the current trends in the enrolment rates. The study uses secondary data that was collected by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) (the demography unit), on primary school age children (population between 6 and 12 years) by gender and region and also data that was collected by the Ministry of Education and Training on enrolments in the primary schools, disaggregated by age, gender and region. The statistical data derived from these two sources was analysed by the researcher to determine the enrolment and participation rates using the common indicators of gross and net enrolment ratios. The analysis would further provide information to assess access to primary education and whether EFA has been reached or not. The Gross and Net Enrolment Ratios were calculated by the usual formulas indicated below:

**Gross Enrolment Ratio** = Total enrolment in primary school **divided** by the Number of Children in the population that were between 6 and 12 years (inclusive) Multiplied by 100%.

**Net Enrolment Ratio** = Total Enrolment in Primary School that is between 6 and 12 years (inclusive) **divided** by the Number of Children in the Population that were between 6 and 12 years (inclusive) Multiplied by 100%.

It further provided trends on the gross and net enrolment ratios and allowed the researcher to use these to project to 2015, and hence determine if the current trends will enable Swaziland to reach EFA by 2015 or not.

As the population and the school enrolment data included a break down by age, region and gender, the researcher was able to calculate the GER and the NER by region and also by gender to find out if there were any disparities. By using population and enrolment data from the same years, this study calculates the indicators based on actual figures rather than estimates. The researcher could not see any inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the data collected, and hence concluded that both CSO and MOET data sets gave accurate information.

For the rhetoric on EFA, a document search and analysis was conducted to indicate the national plans and views on EFA.

### 4. Review of Relevant Literature

In this study, Education for All has been taken as the achievement of universal primary education, where each pupil of primary school age group (6 to 12 years in Swaziland's case) attends primary school. EFA in this study has therefore been taken to be the same as UPE. The World Conference of Education for All (WCEFA) that took place in Jomtien in 1990 was a landmark event in that basic education was put on the international development agenda for the very first time. It gave new life and impetus to the idea that education is a right for all children, young people, men as well as women (Herfkens, 2002). This was followed, ten years later, by the World Forum on Education for All where 164 Governments committed themselves to expand educational opportunities to achieve UPE by 2015.

The achievement of UPE was however not a new thing as rich countries had long made support for education a part of their international development efforts, and multinational organizations had been active in the educational development of poorer countries since at least the end of World War II (Mundy 2006). In Swaziland, this was also not new, as the Imbokodvo (the party that won the elections at independence in 1968) Manifesto, had spelt out that one of its educational policies was that education is an inalienable right of every child and every citizen to receive to the limit of his/her capabilities, and that Universal Free Primary education for every Swazi child was the ultimate goal of the Imbokodvo (His Excellency, The Right Honourable Prince Makhosini, 1972).

How about in other parts of the World, particularly in developing countries, will EFA be achieved by 2015? Klees (2013) puts it strongly and contends that although many observers seem to point out the great progress that has been made towards EFA, he does not get it as the international community has been promising UPE since the 1960s, long before Jomtien, yet it is still far from achieving it that it now has to promise it once more in the post 2015 era. He further goes on to argue that, the post EFA progress that has been made in access is mostly in name only as 200 million or more children enrolled in primary schools are not learning anything. Herfkens (2002) reveals that today, despite the fact that we recognise the importance of education for poverty reduction and development, despite our longstanding political commitment to education for all, despite ongoing national education reforms, millions and millions of the children (two thirds of them being girls) are still not attending school. This is especially the case in many Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) where the targets will not be reached (Dembele & Oviawe, 2007; United Nations, 2006; Mukudu, 2004). Mukudi (2004) continues to correctly point out that although the target of universal primary access has been put at 2015, the majority of countries in SSA are projected to miss this target and that the realisation of the goal of UPE has remained elusive over the years.

What is known therefore, is that despite the considerable progress that has been made by a large number of SSA countries, the pace is slow and many of them are unlikely to achieve the targets enshrined in the EFA targets and MDG goals (UNESCO, 2004). It is further worrying and disturbing to read a new UNESCO study that shows that numbers of out-of-school children is rising, especially in Africa (UNESCOPRESS, 2012). As the same article points out, this trend is cause for serious concern, and hence the usefulness of this study.

## **5. Findings**

### **5.1 The Rhetoric**

Several Ministry of Education documents, e.g. Current Trends in Educational Policy (Swaziland Government, 1976) had indicated that the plan was to achieve UPE by 1985. Several others, as indicated in Table 1, which were produced by the Swaziland Government before the Dakar Forum, also clearly spelt out the Government policy of achieving UPE.

The Swaziland Government has continued to pledge itself to achieving UPE, and the country's Education Sector Strategic Plan (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2010) and the Ministry of Education and Training Sector Policy (Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland, 2011) both spell out the policy clearly as to expand participation to eligible children to 100% by 2015, and make education free, inclusive, accessible and compulsory. One of the strategic objectives and targets therefore was to increase access to primary education to reach the net enrolment ratio of 100% by 2015 (Kingdom of

Swaziland, 2010). As a consequence, the National Education and Training Programme (NETIP) called for the mobilization of communities to register all children of primary school going age in order to achieve the target of net enrolment ratio of 100% by 2015 (Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland, 2013). The right of access to primary schooling has therefore formed the cornerstone of Swaziland's education policy as an integral part of the country's commitment to redress past inequalities, injustices and address the scourge of poverty within the country. With all this emphasis (rhetoric) on achieving UPE, it is therefore in order that one examines whether or not Swaziland is on track to achieving UPE by 2015.

## 5.2 The Reality

**Table 2** shows the gross enrolment ratios (in percentages) for all the four regions of the country by sex, from 2007 to 2011. The table shows that all the GERs are above 100%. This signifies that there are more students (than the appropriate 6 to 12 age group) that are attending primary school. The additional students would be those that are underage, i.e. below the primary entrance age of 6 years, and those that are overage, i.e. above the primary completing age of 12 years. Some close inspection of the data in the source documents revealed that there were more overage students in the primary schools than the underage ones. The GER however shows that the capacity of the primary school system in Swaziland is large enough to enrol all the 6 to 12 year old students in the country, with some space left over. So the capacity of the system is adequate for achieving EFA.

Table 2 further shows that the GER for males is always higher than the GER for females in all the regions. This attests to the fact that there is a greater proportion of males attending primary school than females, as can also be confirmed by the country's overall GER of 136% for males and 123% for females. On top of the differences in the GER of males and females, there are also differences in GER between the regions. Generally, when the data in Table 2 is closely inspected, it is found that the GER for the more rural regions, i.e. Lubombo and Shiselweni, are generally higher than those of the more urban regions of Hhohho and Manzini. This could mean that the students in the more rural regions either start primary school late or repeat classes at a higher rate than pupils from the more urban regions. An analysis of the students' age at entry at primary school and of the repetition rates per region (which has not been done in this study) could help throw some light on this.

**Table 3** shows the net enrolment ratios (in percentages) for all the four regions of the country by gender, for the years from 2007 to 2011. It is seen that all the NERs are below 100%, except for Shiselweni Region in the year 2007, which had a male rate of 116% and a total NER rate of 105%. The Shiselweni Region's rate is an outlier therefore for 2007, so there is reason to suspect that the data collected and presented on this region for that year was not quite accurate. This suggests that there are some problems with this information. Since almost all the figures in Table 3 are below 100%, it shows that UPE (as referred to in Swaziland) or EFA has not been achieved in the country. The figures are however very close to 100% or to the achievement of UPE, so the country has done well towards the achievement of this EFA target. What is worrying and disconcerting though is the fact that these figures do not seem to have changed or increased between 2007 and 2011. For example, in 2007 the NER for Hhohho was 94% and in 2011 it was 93%, for Lubombo it was 93% in 2007 and 94% in 2011. The overall NER for the whole country has not changed also from the 93% in 2007 as it was the same figure in 2011. This has some implications to whether the country is on track to achieving EFA or not.

The table further shows that the NER for males tends to be higher than that for females, indicating that more 6 to 12 year old males attend primary school than females. This is the case for all the years from 2007 to 2011. Why is this the case? Further research is required on this issue. There however, does not appear to be any regional differences in the NERs, as all of them are in the 90s.

## **6. Discussion**

This study found high and impressive gross and net enrolment ratios for Swaziland. What is of concern though is the fact that the NER has remained stagnant. This finding supports Fredriksen's (2002) observation that education stagnation had been experienced by most SSA countries. It further confirms UNESCO's (2004) assertion that although considerable progress has been made by many countries in SSA, the pace is slow. So it is not only unique to Swaziland, as other SSA countries have experienced this slow pace and stagnation. However, according to the MOET paper entitled "Brief Assessment Report on Education For All" (Government of Swaziland, 2013) it used the NER for the years 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 and concluded that the pattern of enrolment has changed impressively in that the NER was increasing and this it attributed to the reduction of barriers in education (p. 8). In the current researcher's data however, with the inclusion of 2007 data, this increase is not apparent, as the 2007 NER figure of 93% is the same as that of 2011 which is also 93%. The current researcher therefore concludes that there is no drastic NER increase and that the rates seem to have remained static. If this trend continues, EFA will not be achieved by 2015. Hence the country is not on track to achieving EFA by 2015, unless it introduces major reforms and further eliminates existing barriers and institute a "Big Push" to have all the 6 to 12 year olds in school.

It is of concern that gender disparities continue to exist in the primary school system despite its expansion of access. There is therefore no equal access on the system and girls are being left behind and thus violating goal number 3 of the MDGs. It is further worrying that about 6% of the primary school age population is not attending primary school, why? Avenstrup et al (2004, p.1) reveals that schooling costs for families are a major constraint to achieving UPE. Is this the case in Swaziland, particularly with the females? If it is, what should be done? Are there other constraints on top of the financial ones? Further research is required on this.

## **7. Conclusion**

The study set out to find out if Swaziland is on track to achieving the EFA target by 2015. What the study has found is that:

1. Despite the country having achieved high and impressive gross and net enrolment ratios, the NERs are still less than 100%. They further remain constant and are not rising as expected and desired. This means that there is still a large number of 6 to 12 year olds who are not attending primary school. Unless some drastic reforms that will result in a big push for these rates to increase to 100% are implemented, the country is unlikely to achieve the EFA target by 2015.
2. The rhetoric – there are several government pronouncements, documents, speeches, etc. that have indicated that achieving the EFA targets/goals are the major policy of the Government of Swaziland and the Ministry of Education and Training. Some of these date as far back as the time the country gained its Independence in 1968. Despite this rhetoric however, UPE still has not been achieved, and will not be achieved by 2015 with the current rates of growth.

3. The reality – the results of this study indicate that Swaziland is not on track to achieving EFA targets by 2015. Further, there seems to be gender differences in accessing primary schools, with the females lagging behind and the males having larger access to primary schooling. This study's findings show no regional differences as regards the NERs. So all the four regions seem to have equal access to primary school.
4. One other finding of this study is that the rhetoric on achieving EFA by 2015 does not seem to match the reality on the ground. The rhetoric provides that EFA should have been achieved a long time ago and also that it will be achieved by 2015. The reality is that EFA will not be reached by 2015 when current trends are used. To achieve EFA, these trends have to change. Thus Swaziland needs to eliminate all barriers to primary education, introduce huge policy reforms, and institute a really "Big Push" to have all the 6 to 12 year olds to attend school. As it is currently, the achievement of EFA targets by 2015 is mere rhetoric and not reality.

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**Table 1: Swaziland Government Documents on the Policy of EFA/UPE Produced Before the Dakar Forum**

<b>Document Giving Information</b>	<b>Statement Made in Document on UPE</b>	<b>Year of Document</b>
Post Independence National Development Plan	The long-term objective of education and training is that primary education should be free and universal (p. 47).	1969
Imbokodvo Manifesto – The Philosophy, Policies and Objectives of the Imbokodvo National Movement	Education is an inalienable right of every child and every citizen to receive to the limit of his/her capabilities, and that Universal Free Primary education for every Swazi child was the ultimate goal of the Imbokodvo (p. 26 & 27).	1972
Second National Development Plan 1973 – 1977.	Increase the number of students in the 7 – 13 age group so that by the end of the Plan period it is likely that over 80 percent of the age group will have the opportunity to go to school. Thus the prospect of universal primary education will be considerably nearer (p. 159).	1973
Report of the National Education Commission 1975	Universal Primary Education should be implemented by 1980 (p. 19).	1975
Current Trends in Educational Policy	The Swaziland Government has decided to work towards achieving universal primary education by 1985 (p. 1).	1976
A financial and Statistical Analysis of Swaziland's Educational System with Projections to 1985.	We also recognize that Swaziland's goal of "Universal Primary Education" is understood to mean providing the opportunity for primary school education to each primary school age child. ....The assumption underlying the primary school enrolment projections was that UPE would be achieved by 1985 (p. 8).	1977
National Policy Statement	Universal access to basic education will remain a priority within available financial and other resource capacities. The ministry of Education shall provide a 10 year Universal Basic Education to all children of school going age (p. 3).	1999

**Table 2: Gross Enrolment Ratios (in percentages) by Gender and Region from 2007 to 2011.**

Year	Hhohho Region			Lubombo Region			Manzini Region			Shiselweni Region			Total		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
2007	124	112	118	130	119	124	112	103	108	154	118	135	127	112	119
2008*															122**
2009	129	115	122	138	123	130	131	115	123	137	121	129	133	118	126
2010	135	121	128	143	129	136	137	122	129	139	124	132	138	124	131
2011	136	122	129	141	128	134	134	120	127	135	122	128	136	123	129

• = In 2008, school enrolment data by single age, gender and region is not available.

\*\* = Gross Enrolment Ratio of 122% for the whole country taken from Table 3.1 (p. 27) of Marope (2010)

**Table 3: Net Enrolment Ratios (in percentages) by Gender and Region from 2007 to 2011.**

Year	Hhohho Region			Lubombo Region			Manzini Region			Shiselweni Region			Total		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
2007	95	93	94	94	92	93	86	85	86	116	97	105	96	91	93
2008*															
2009	86	84	85	88	87	87	87	84	85	89	85	87	87	85	86
2010	92	90	91	94	93	94	95	91	93	93	89	91	93	91	92
2011	95	91	93	96	92	94	97	91	94	91	88	90	95	90	93

• \* = In 2008, school enrolment data by single age, gender and region is not available.

• \*\* = Net Enrolment Ratio of 84% for the whole country taken from Table 3.1 (p. 27) of Marope (2010)