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# Aid to Basic Education in Africa – Opportunities and Constraints

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## Aid to Basic Education in Africa: Opportunities and Constraints

Christopher Colclough<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

This paper identifies some of the main ways in which aid to basic education in Africa can be made more effective. It documents the special educational problems faced in Sub-Saharan Africa, in the context of public expenditures on, and aid flows to education - and particularly to primary schooling. It argues that improving the productivity of educational aid requires better aid co-ordination. Although this has begun to happen by consequence of the discussions of national development objectives and policies in consultative groups and similar fora, recipient countries need to take a much firmer grip on the process. Improved aid impact will also require more success in helping to create indigenous development capacity. Educational aid needs to strengthen national institutions and human resources more successfully than has happened in the past. Desirable reforms to the aid process, which should help to secure these objectives, are discussed, distinguishing between those which are pertinent for large and for smaller aid agencies.

### 1. Introduction

School enrolments at all levels in developing countries have expanded by very large amounts during the last 40 years. Although most emphasis was initially placed on the higher levels, governments have, with barely an exception, put considerable efforts and resources into expanding primary education over that period. Yet, in spite of that effort, many children remain excluded from education or drop out at an early stage.

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<sup>1</sup> The author is a Professorial Fellow of the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex. He is indebted to Samer Al-Samarrai and to Lucy Stevens for research assistance in the preparation of this paper.



By the late 1980s, in most countries of East Asia and perhaps another 30 countries elsewhere, primary schooling for all (SFA)<sup>2</sup> had been achieved. By consequence, a strong foundation for accelerated human development and, often, for accelerated economic growth, was laid. Nevertheless, it became clear that special action would be needed in the majority of developing countries in order to achieve SFA.

At the World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, education and finance ministers from 168 countries, together with representatives of non-government organisations, donors and international agencies, agreed on an accelerated programme of action to increase the coverage and quality of primary schooling and also to expand adult education so as to achieve basic education and literacy for all.

Subsequently, many countries developed and implemented new plans, whilst UNESCO, the World Bank, UNICEF, the EU and some bilateral donors increased their international support. Furthermore a special initiative was organized for the nine countries having the largest numbers of illiterate adults and youth. Rapid progress was achieved in some of those countries - particularly Bangladesh and Pakistan, where primary enrolments increased by some 40 and 80 per cent, respectively, over the five years.

A mid-decade assessment (UNESCO 1996a, 1996b) revealed that by 1995:

- More than 100 countries had developed plans and strategies to achieve their own education for all (EFA) goals, of which about half had allocated increased budgetary resources for this purpose;
- Total primary enrolments had risen by about 50 million since 1990, whilst the number of children out of school fell by 20 million, from about 130 to 110 million.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Schooling for All' can be defined as 'the circumstance of having a school system in which all eligible children are enrolled in schools of at least minimally acceptable quality'. It differs from UPE, which may be defined as 'having a primary GER of 100 or more', in that it incorporates the notions of the age of enrolees and of school quality. See Colclough with Lewin 1993: 40-41.



- Levels of illiteracy have been falling in most parts of the world, and for the first time, an absolute decline in the total number of illiterates worldwide is now expected during the next few years.

Although this broad record is impressive the challenge ahead remains large, particularly in the poorest and least developed countries, and especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This paper documents the special educational problems faced in SSA, focussing particularly upon primary schooling. The role of development assistance to this sector over the last decade is reviewed, and its potential to address Africa's problems in primary schooling is assessed. Improving the productivity of educational aid requires better aid coordination, and more sustainable interventions. Desirable reforms to the aid process, to secure these objectives, are discussed. Finally, a set of particular opportunities facing smaller aid agencies are identified.

## **2. The Importance of Primary Schooling within Basic Education**

Notions of what constitutes basic education vary. A judgement about a minimum education package which should be available, as a matter of right, to everyone is usually relativist - encompassing a greater number of years in richer than in poorer societies. Basic education, defined in that way, would in Europe normally be thought to comprise primary and at least middle-secondary schooling, whereas in much of Africa, it would be confined to primary schooling lasting only, perhaps, six years. However, in societies where many children still do not attend school, or drop out early, basic education often also includes programmes of non-formal education - such as literacy and numeracy training and some forms of vocational training for youths and adults - which help to provide basic skills.

The establishment of literacy and numeracy amongst the majority of a population appears to bring a wide range of economic and social benefits. The most effective means of securing widespread literacy and numeracy is by making primary schooling, of reasonable quality, accessible to all children within a reasonably short planning horizon. Adult literacy schemes, are effective when well targeted. But their importance is transitional - being a highly desirable medium-term supplement to a longer-term school-based policy for achieving EFA goals.



The developmental importance of primary schooling is well established in the research literature.<sup>3</sup> Its benefits are not confined only to those who work in the formal sector: primary schooling improves productivity also in the rural and urban informal sectors, including in agricultural work (particularly where the potential for innovation and agricultural change exists). In addition, reductions in fertility, improvements to family health and nutrition, and reductions in infant and child mortality are each associated with higher levels of primary school attendance, particularly for women.

The quality of schools in developing countries affects the cognitive achievements of their pupils to a greater extent than in richer countries. Here, the critical variables appear to be the qualifications, experience and educational levels of teachers, and the availability (and use) of good textbooks. Most countries in SSA are at the stage of experiencing increasing returns to such expenditures. Strengthening and expanding access to higher quality primary school systems in Africa can also be expected to bring significant improvements to the average quality of student achievement at secondary and tertiary levels over the medium term: under-performance there often relates to problems of quality lower down the school system.

### **3. Primary Schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Over the two decades ending in 1980, primary enrolments doubled in Asia and Latin America, whilst in Africa they tripled. Thus, over those years, the proportion of children enrolled in primary schools increased faster in Africa than in other regions of the developing world. This pattern was reversed, however after 1980, when rates of enrolment growth were cut sharply, to levels which, in Africa, were lower even than the rate of growth of population. By consequence, both the gross and net enrolment ratios, for Sub-Saharan Africa taken as a whole, actually fell throughout the 1980s.<sup>4</sup> Most available data suggest that this decline continued at least through 1992 (see Tables 1 and 2 and Figure 1) such that, by that year, scarcely more than half of the primary school-aged population of SSA were attending school (Table 2). Moreover,

<sup>3</sup> For a summary of what is known see Colclough with Lewin 1993: Chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> The gross enrolment ratio (GER) is the most widely used indicator of schooling availability. It expresses total enrolment at a given level of schooling - irrespective of the age of the students - as a percentage of the population which, according to national regulations, is of an age to attend at that level. The net enrolment ratio (NER) takes account of the age structure of those enrolled by excluding all those children who are older or younger than the officially eligible age group from the numerator of the ratio. That statistic provides a better indication of the availability of schooling than does the GER, but it is less frequently used owing to the required age-adjusted enrolment data being less available and less accurate on an internationally comparable basis than the unadjusted data.



recent data for individual countries suggest that, although 10 million additional pupils were enrolled in SSA between 1990 and 1995, the school age population increased by almost twice that number (UNESCO 1996b). School efficiency too did not improve. Thus, the decline in both gross and net enrolment ratios continued through 1995 in more than half of SSA countries, and in one fifth the absolute number of children enrolled actually declined. Uniquely amongst developing regions, a majority of countries in SSA now have a smaller proportion of their children in school than was the case in 1980.

**Table 1.**  
**Gross Primary Enrolment Ratios by Region**

	1960	1980	1990	1992
Africa	41.9	81.7	75.8	76.6
Asia	79.8	96.1	104.1	103.1
Latin America and the Caribbean	72	105.4	106.8	108.2
Developing Countries	72.2	95.0	98.9	98.4
Developed Countries	105.9	96.6	99.4	99.7

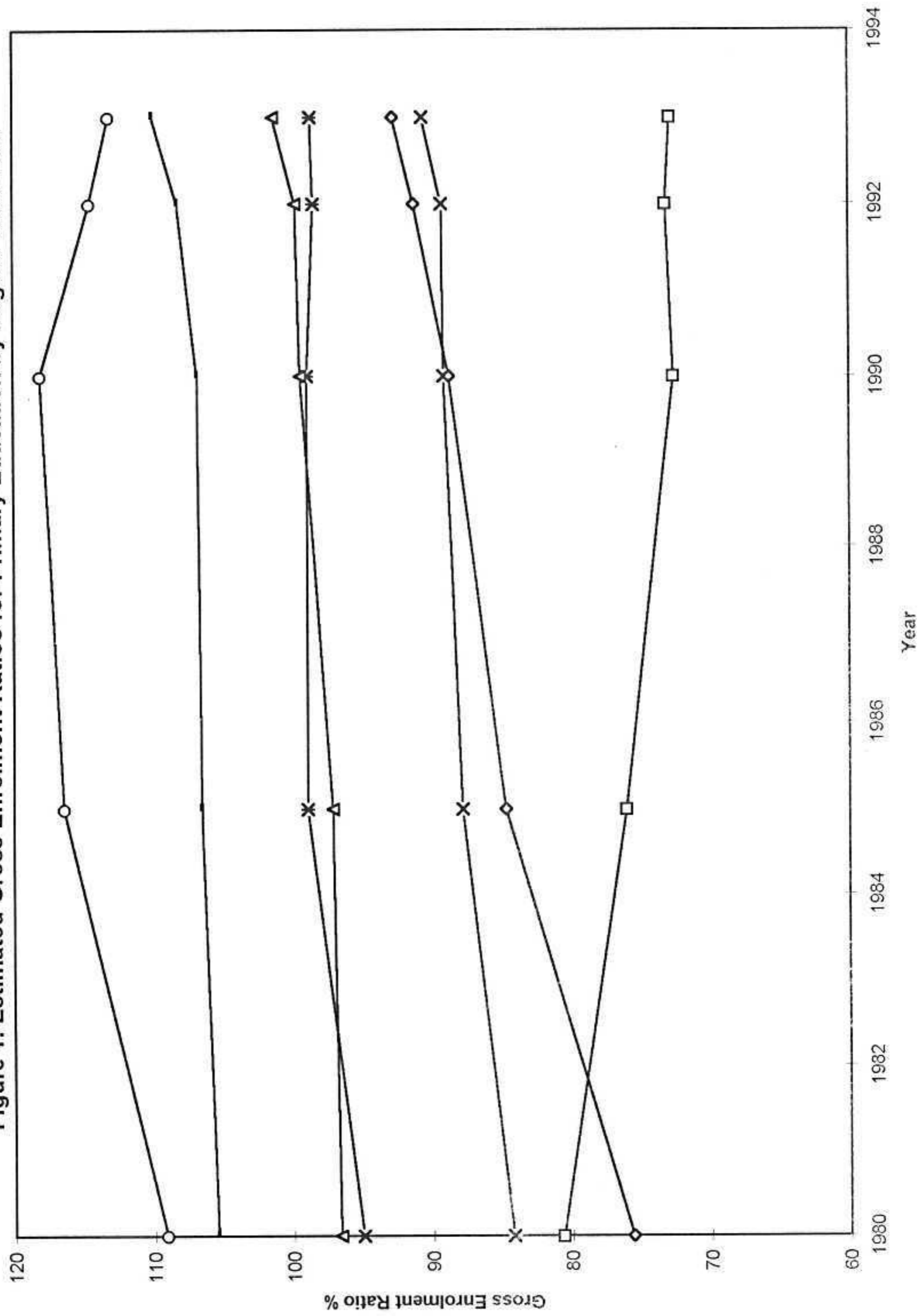
**Source:** Trends and Projections of Enrolment by Level of Education and Age 1960-2025 (as assessed in 1993) UNESCO  
UNESCO, Statistical Yearbook, 1995

**Table 2.**  
**Net Primary Enrolment Ratios (6 to 11 year olds) by Region**

	1960	1980	1990	1992
Africa	32	60	57	56
Asia	52	70	81	81
Latin America and the Caribbean	58	83	87	88
Developing Countries	48	69	77	77
Developed Countries	91	92	92	92

**Source:** UNESCO, Statistical Yearbooks, 1989 and 1994.

Figure 1: Estimated Gross Enrolment Ratios for Primary Education by Region 1980-1993



Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1995



School quality, too, in much of SSA is low. Children are typically taught in much larger classes than is compatible with effective learning, and the average number of pupils per teacher in SSA is higher than in any other world region except South Asia. Teachers are often unqualified; teaching aids are few, and textbook provision is desperately poor in many countries. In some countries, (e.g. Zambia) it is not uncommon for pupils to be taught in schools without desks, chairs or windows, nor is it unusual for classes to be held outdoors. Where quality is low, learning is slow and children are unable to meet the demands of the curriculum. Consequently, repetition tends to be higher in systems of low quality, which in turn tends to raise the average age of the student population. It is significant that only about three-quarters of pupils in primary schools in SSA are within the official school-age group, compared with over four-fifths in each of the other developing regions. This is partly because the average age of first enrolment is higher in Africa than elsewhere, and it is not uncommon for less than half of the new Grade 1 entrants to be of the right age. But it is also because rates of repetition are higher (typically two to three times greater than other developing regions) with the result that one in every five pupils is repeating a grade, causing a greater proportion of children to complete primary schooling at ages beyond the top of the official age range.<sup>5</sup>

Low quality leads to reduced effectiveness of schooling and thus to lower actual and expected benefits from the schooling process. By consequence, for any given level of first enrolment, more pupils will tend to drop out, where school quality remains low or declines.

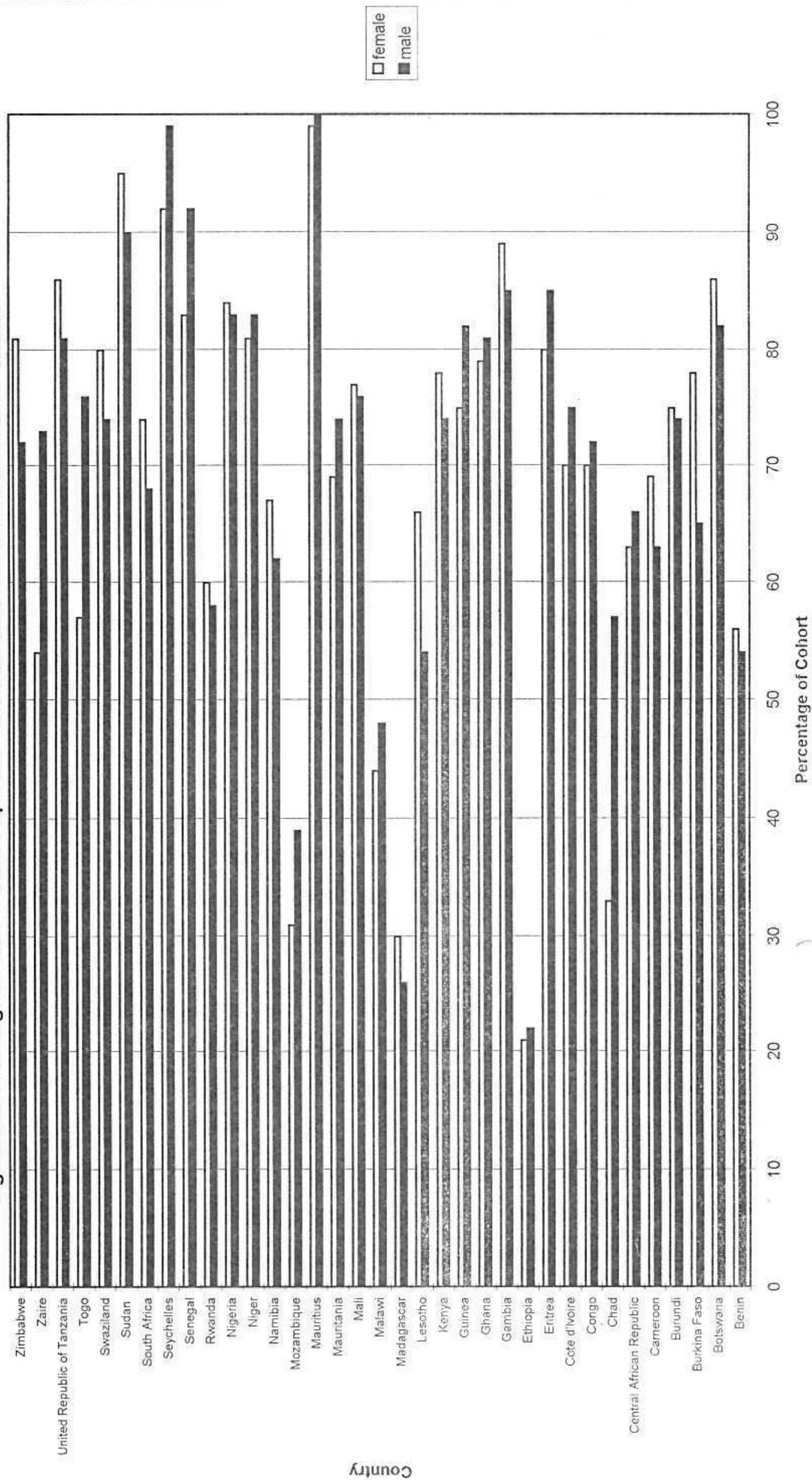
High rates of drop out are a major problem in SSA primary schools, as indicated by Figure 2. This shows, on the basis of repetition and drop-out rates for 35 countries in the early 1990s, the proportion of the 1991 intake to primary school expected to survive to Grade 5 in each country. In half of the countries shown, less than three quarters of pupils will reach grade 5 and thus will almost certainly leave school prior to attaining durable standards of literacy and numeracy. But in some countries things are much worse, with less than half of enrollees staying in school to Grade 5 (e.g. Mozambique, Malawi, Madagascar, and Ethiopia). Thus, in many of the countries shown in Figure 2, the problem of low Grade 1 enrolments is compounded by subsequent high rates of drop-out, so as to reduce to tiny proportions the number of those able to gain lasting benefits from primary schooling.

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<sup>5</sup> See UNESCO 1996b: 8.



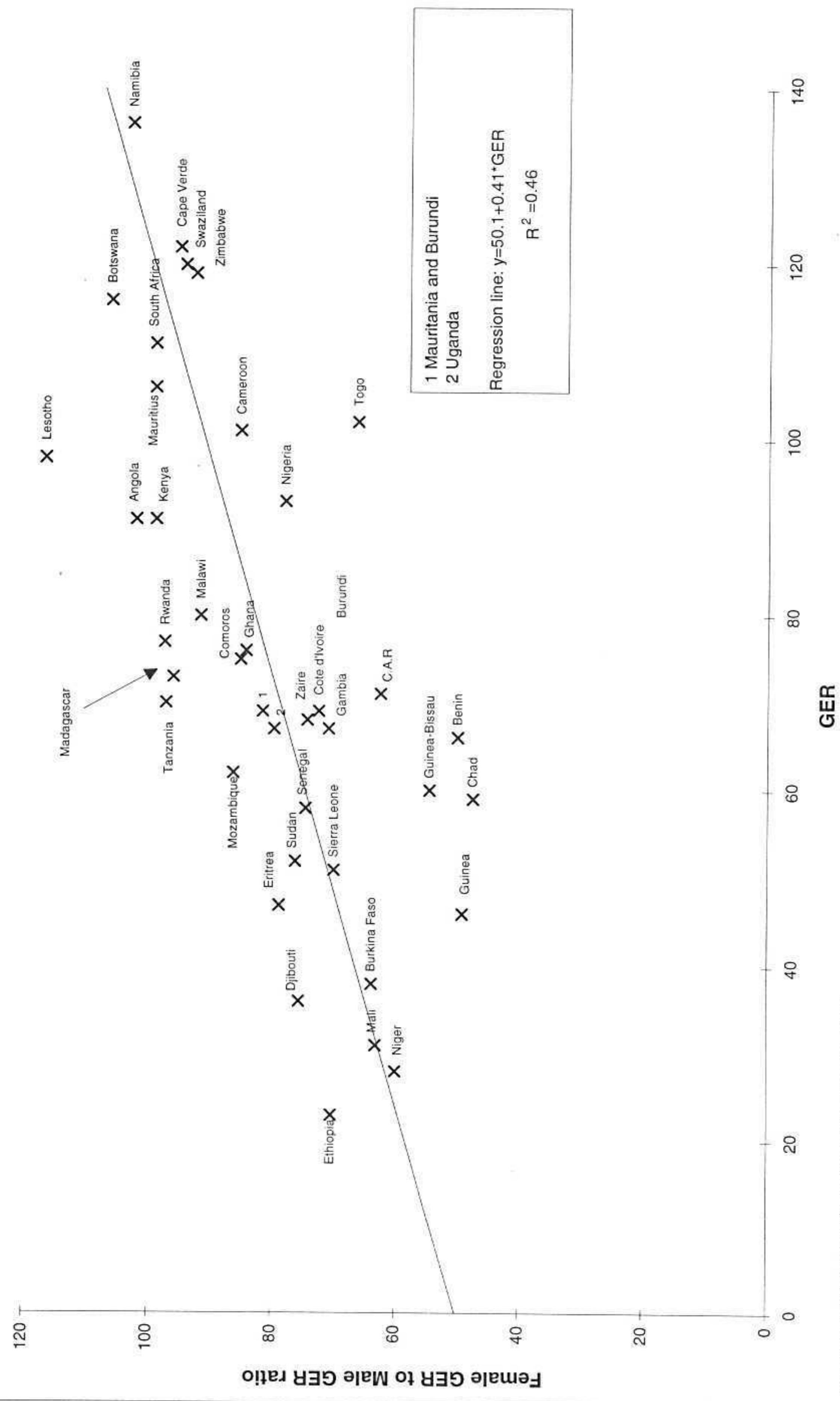
Figure 2: Percentage of 1991 Cohort Expected to Reach Grade 5 in Sub-Saharan Countries



Source: UNESCO World Education Report 1995



**Figure 3: Primary Gross Enrolment Ratios and Gender Gaps in Sub-Saharan Africa 1992/3**



Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1995

The problems of restricted availability of schooling and of low school quality, together with their associated phenomena of high rates of repetition and drop-out, affect the enrolment, persistence and performance of girls particularly sharply. Figure 3 shows that there is a strong association, in SSA, between low GERs and high gender imbalances in enrolments: underenrolment is particularly concentrated amongst girls. The graph shows that 18 of the 19 countries with GERs of 70 or less have at least 20 per cent fewer girls enrolled than boys, and in eight of them there are more than one-third fewer girls than boys. Recent work shows that this is caused by a complex of factors often related to poverty, not only across, but also within countries: the opportunity costs of sending girls to school are higher than boys, whilst the direct benefits are perceived to be lower; cultural factors leading to greater reluctance to send girls to school are also important; in both cases these tendencies seem to be sharper in more traditional, and poorer environments (Rose et. al. 1997; Tembon et.al. 1997). One of the implications of this work is that policies to expand and improve schooling which do not recognize and help to neutralize the special pressures which reduce the enrolment and performance of girls would be unlikely to enable the achievement of SFA.

#### **4. Trends in Educational Expenditure**

In the light of the declining enrolment ratios and low quality of schooling in SSA reported above, it is, at first sight, surprising to note from Table 3 that Sub-Saharan African countries maintained, and, if anything, slightly increased their public expenditures on education, expressed as a proportion of national incomes, over the period 1980-93. Moreover, both the table and Figure 4 show that the region's educational malaise seems not to be caused by any general neglect of education in comparison with practice elsewhere: a higher proportion of GNP is allocated in SSA, via State expenditures, to education, than typically occurs in other regions (except for the Arab States, which allocate an approximately similar amount of national resources to education as do the countries of SSA).

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<sup>6</sup> Although reductions in real per capita income have been even greater in the Arab States, incomes in those countries are much higher than in SSA, and the consequences of decline have, for them, been less dire.

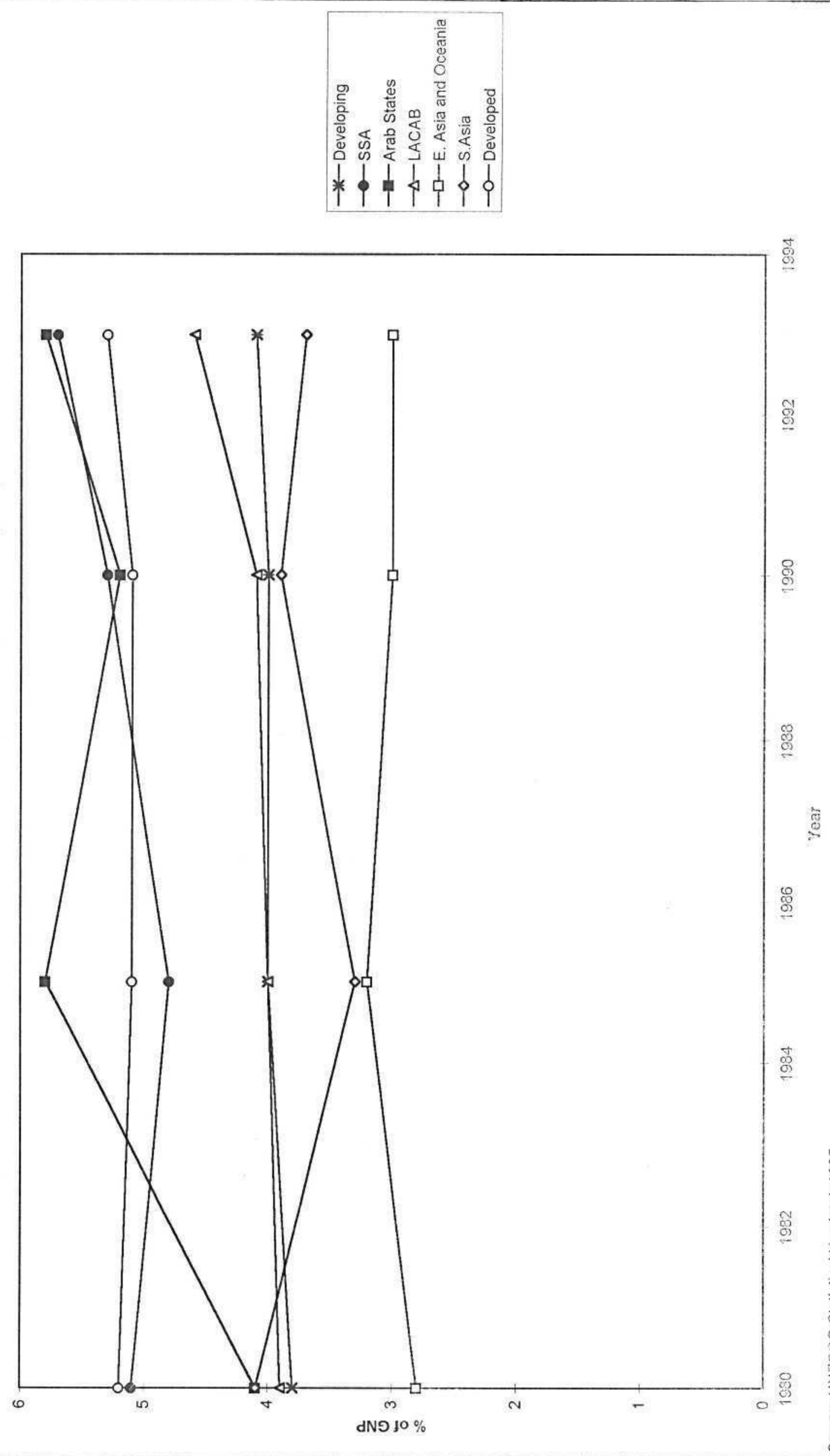


Table 3: Trends in Public Expenditure on Education and GNP per capita by Region

	Public expenditure on Education as a Proportion of GNP				Avg. ann. growth of GNP per capita 1980-1993	Public Expenditure on Education Per Inhabitant (U.S. \$)			
	1980	1985	1990	1993		1980	1985	1990	1993
	Sub-Saharan	5,1	4,8	5,3		5,7	-0,8	41	26
Arab States	4,1	5,8	5,2	5,8	-2,4	109	122	111	116
Latin America	3,9	4,0	4,1	4,6	-0,1	95	72	107	143
Eastern Asia	2,8	3,2	3,0	3,0	6,4	12	14	20	28
Southern Asia	4,1	3,3	3,9	3,7	3,0	13	14	30	12

Sources: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1995 and World Development Report 1995

Figure 4: Public Expenditure on Education as a percentage of GNP by Region, 1980-93



Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1995



However, Table 3 also shows that per capita income in SSA has fallen by almost 1 per cent per year in real terms over the period 1980-93.<sup>6</sup> Thus, real national resources per person have fallen by almost 20 per cent since 1980, and even though educational expenditures have risen as a proportion of GNP, these have been insufficient to prevent a fairly catastrophic reduction in the real resources available to schools and colleges. As indicated by the final four columns of Table 3, nominal public spending

**Table 4: Primary Recurrent Expenditure in Sub-Saharan Africa in Comparison with other Regions**

	Recurrent education expenditure as a percentage of GNP			Primary recurrent education expenditure as a proportion of total recurrent education expenditure			Primary recurrent expenditure as a proportion of GNP		
	1980 (1)	1990 (2)	1992 (3)	1980 (4)	1990 (5)	1992 (6)	1980 (1)*(4)	1990 (2)*(5)	1992 (3)*(6)
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>									
Benin	4,2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Botswana	5,3	5,4	6,1	52,1	32,5	31,1	2,8	1,8	1,9
Burkina Faso	2,4	2,7	1,4	32,3	41,7	n.a.	0,8	1,1	n.a.
Burundi	2,6	3,3	3,6	42,7	46,8	44,5	1,1	1,5	1,6
Cameroon	2,6	3,1	2,7	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Cape Verde	n.a.	n.a.	4,3	n.a.	n.a.	54,7	n.a.	n.a.	2,4
Central African Republic	3,6	2,8	n.a.	54,9	52,7	n.a.	2,0	1,5	n.a.
Chad	n.a.	n.a.	2,3	n.a.	n.a.	43,6	n.a.	n.a.	1,0
Comoros	n.a.	4,0	4,1	n.a.	42,4	40,8	n.a.	1,7	1,7
Congo	6,6	5,4	8,5	35,8	n.a.	n.a.	2,4	n.a.	n.a.
Cote d'Ivoire	6,0	n.a.	6,7	46,8	n.a.	n.a.	2,8	n.a.	n.a.
Djibouti	n.a.	3,4	3,8	58,4	58,0	53,4	n.a.	2,0	2,0
Equatorial Guinea	n.a.	n.a.	1,7	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Ethiopia	2,6	4,0	4,1	42,0	53,9	53,6	1,1	2,2	2,2
Gabon	2,0	n.a.	2,6	n.a.	n.a.	43,5	n.a.	n.a.	1,1
Gambia	2,9	2,9	2,6	49,2	41,6	42,7	1,4	1,2	1,1
Ghana	n.a.	n.a.	2,7	29,3	29,2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Guinea	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	24,7	32,8	35,0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Guinea-Bissau	4,0	n.a.	n.a.	75,8	n.a.	n.a.	3,0	n.a.	n.a.
Kenya	6,2	6,1	5,1	64,4	58,1	62,3	4,0	3,5	3,2
Lesotho	4,1	3,0	4,7	38,6	51,0	48,8	1,6	1,5	2,3
Liberia	4,9	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Madagascar	3,7	1,5	n.a.	41,4	49,1	n.a.	1,5	0,7	n.a.
Malawi	2,6	2,4	3,5	38,9	48,1	55,4	1,0	1,2	1,9
Mali	3,7	n.a.	2,0	38,8	n.a.	47,2	1,4	n.a.	0,9
Mauritania	5,0	n.a.	3,9	35,4	n.a.	37,0	1,8	n.a.	1,4
Mauritius	4,7	3,4	n.a.	44,1	37,5	n.a.	2,1	1,3	n.a.
Mozambique	3,8	4,0	n.a.	n.a.	49,8	n.a.	n.a.	2,0	n.a.
Niger	1,5	2,3	3,0	36,8	48,5	46,5	0,6	1,1	1,4
Nigeria	5,1	n.a.	n.a.	17,2	n.a.	n.a.	0,9	n.a.	n.a.
Rwanda	2,3	3,5	n.a.	67,1	67,7	n.a.	1,5	2,4	n.a.
Senegal	4,4	4,1	4,2	42,8	43,0	n.a.	1,9	1,8	n.a.
Seychelles	5,5	8,1	7,3	n.a.	28,2	n.a.	n.a.	2,3	n.a.
Sierra Leone	3,6	1,3	n.a.	n.a.	21,2	n.a.	n.a.	0,3	n.a.
Somalia	0,9	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
South Africa	n.a.	5,8	6,4	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Sudan	4,4	n.a.	n.a.	48,0	n.a.	n.a.	2,1	n.a.	n.a.
Swaziland	4,7	5,2	5,6	45,8	32,9	31,5	2,2	1,7	1,8
Togo	5,4	5,2	6,5	29,5	30,4	31,8	1,6	1,6	2,1
Uganda	1,1	1,4	1,8	16,2	n.a.	n.a.	0,2	n.a.	n.a.
United Republic of Tanzania	3,6	4,4	n.a.	54,4	41,6	n.a.	2,0	1,8	n.a.
Zaire	2,6	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Zambia	4,2	2,3	n.a.	45,3	43,9	n.a.	1,9	1,0	n.a.
Zimbabwe	6,4	10,4	8,3	66,5	54,1	51,6	4,3	5,6	4,3
<b>Regional Averages</b>									
Sub-Saharan Africa	3,94	4,41	4,65	45,35	45,28	45,25	1,96	2,08	2,16
Latin America and the Caribbean	4,74	3,88	3,77	42,35	38,97	39,59	1,99	1,61	1,53
Asia	3,60	3,20	3,34	40,01	40,79	40,32	1,40	1,25	1,29
Developing Countries	4,08	3,49	3,49	41,65	40,14	40,28	1,68	1,44	1,41
Developed Countries	4,88	5,04	5,74	33,50	30,37	29,94	1,59	1,55	1,75

Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1995 (figures in italics are for years other than those specified)

Notes: 1. Within each set of three columns averages are shown only for countries having data entries in each column.

2. Averages for regions other than SSA have been calculated in the same way as those for SSA.

Table 5: Public Expenditure on Education in Anglophone and Francophone Africa, 1980 and 1992

	Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GNP		Public expenditure on education as a percentage of total government expenditure	
	1980	1992	1980	1992
<b>Anglophone Africa</b>				
Botswana	7,0	7,5	16,1	14,8
Cameroon	3,2	3,0	20,3	16,9
Gambia	3,3	2,7	n.a.	12,9
Ghana	3,1	3,1	17,1	24,3
Kenya	6,8	5,4	18,1	n.a.
Lesotho	5,1	6,0	14,8	n.a.
Liberia	5,7	n.a.	24,3	n.a.
Malawi	3,4	3,4	8,4	10,3
Mauritius	5,3	3,7	11,6	11,8
Namibia	1,6	8,6	n.a.	n.a.
Nigeria	6,4	0,5	24,7	n.a.
Sierra Leone	3,8	n.a.	11,8	n.a.
South Africa	n.a.	7,0	n.a.	22,1
Swaziland	6,1	6,8	n.a.	17,5
Uganda	1,2	2,0	11,3	15,0
United Republic of Tanzania	4,4	5,0	11,2	11,4
Zambia	4,5	2,6	7,6	8,7
Zimbabwe	6,6	10,1	13,7	n.a.
Anglophone Average	4,5	4,7	13,0	14,2
<b>Francophone Africa</b>				
Burkina Faso	2,6	1,5	19,8	n.a.
Burundi	3,0	3,7	17,5	11,9
Cape Verde	n.a.	4,4	n.a.	19,9
Central African Republic	3,8	2,8	20,9	n.a.
Chad	n.a.	2,6	n.a.	6,8
Congo	7,0	8,6	23,6	n.a.
Cote d'Ivoire	7,2	n.a.	22,6	n.a.
Djibouti	n.a.	3,8	11,5	11,1
Equatorial Guinea	n.a.	1,8	n.a.	5,6
Gabon	2,7	3,2	n.a.	n.a.
Guinea	n.a.	2,4	n.a.	n.a.
Madagascar	4,4	1,5	n.a.	n.a.
Mali	3,8	2,1	30,8	13,2
Niger	3,1	3,1	22,9	10,8
Rwanda	2,7	n.a.	21,6	n.a.
Seychelles	5,8	8,5	14,4	12,9
Togo	5,6	6,7	19,4	21,6
Zaire	2,6	n.a.	24,2	n.a.
Francophone Average	4,2	4,2	19,4	13,6

Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1995

Note: Within each pair of columns averages are shown only for countries having data entries in each column.



on education per inhabitant (measured in US dollars) in SSA fell by about 30 per cent over 1980-93, which would imply a somewhat greater cut, when measured in real purchasing power terms. The consequent fall in real budgetary provision per pupil has brought serious declines in school quality. As one symptom of this, class size - already much too high in many places - increased in almost two thirds of SSA countries over the period 1990-95.<sup>7</sup>

The data in Table 4 indicate that on average, countries in SSA spend just less than half of their recurrent education budget on the primary system. This is a slightly higher proportion than has been typical in Latin America and in Asia - as one would expect given the proportionately larger secondary and tertiary enrolments in those regions, in comparison with SSA. Such comparisons are not conclusive, since there are reasons to suppose that the unit cost differentials between primary systems and higher levels of education in SSA are greater than is desirable and that the proportional importance of secondary and tertiary spending should thus be reduced. Nevertheless, these macro data provide little support for the view that the priority afforded to expenditure on primary schooling in SSA is seriously out of line, in comparison with other developing

Table 6: Current Expenditure on Pupils and Teachers in Anglophone and Francophone Africa in 1992

	% Share of Total recurrent expenditure for teachers salaries	Current expenditure per pupil as a proportion of GNP per capita			Pupil teacher ratios		Average teachers salaries as a proportion of GNP per capita	
		1st level	2nd level	3rd level	1st level	2nd level	1st level	2nd level
<b>Anglophone Africa</b>								
Botswana	43,3	9	52	265	29	20	1,13	4,50
Gambia	38,5	10	25	n.a.	30	29	1,16	2,79
Ghana	62,7	5	16	234	29	18	0,91	1,81
Malawi	52,8	11	101	890	68	27	3,95	14,40
Mauritius	62,5	10	18	115	21	21	1,31	2,36
South Africa	78,6	20	n.a.	74	n.a.	26	n.a.	n.a.
Swaziland	61,6	7	26	244	33	18	1,42	2,88
<b>Anglophone Average</b>	<b>57,1</b>	<b>10,3</b>	<b>39,7</b>	<b>303,7</b>	<b>35,0</b>	<b>22,7</b>	<b>1,6</b>	<b>4,8</b>
<b>Francophone Africa</b>								
Burkina Faso	54,0	21	67	1345	60	39	6,80	14,11
Burundi	56,1	14	105	1199	63	25	4,95	14,73
Central African Republic	68,1	10	20	395	90	38	6,13	5,18
Chad	58,6	10	36	196	64	35	3,75	7,38
Comoros	75,8	10	53	1770	39	24	2,96	9,64
Guinea	58,7	12	41	342	49	29	3,45	6,98
Mauritania	52,1	12	72	196	51	20	3,19	7,50
Morocco	88,1	12	54	84	28	15	2,96	7,14
Rwanda	80,7	16	53	1167	58	14	7,49	5,99
Senegal	70,4	18	42	382	59	23	7,48	6,80
Seychelles	58,0	9	53	n.a.	18	13	0,94	4,00
Togo	57,6	12	51	351	53	43	3,66	12,63
<b>Francophone Average</b>	<b>64,9</b>	<b>13,0</b>	<b>53,9</b>	<b>675,2</b>	<b>52,7</b>	<b>26,5</b>	<b>4,5</b>	<b>8,5</b>

Source: UNESCO World Education Report 1995

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The data showing an increase in pupil/teacher ratios are given in UNESCO (1996b:16). Such trends need not necessarily imply increases in average class size, depending upon whether or not other reforms, such as shift systems, changes in the frequency of class teaching, etc are introduced. However, in most cases these have generally not been used so as to prevent changes in pupil/teacher ratios affecting average class size.



country regions. On the other hand, there are undoubtedly some country cases (such as Burkina Faso, CAR, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, and Ghana pre-reform) where insufficient priority for education, and for primary schooling in particular, is demonstrated by these recent patterns of spending.

Tables 5 and 6 allow some comparison between expenditure trends and priorities as between Anglophone and Francophone countries in Africa. It can be seen from Table 5 that the Anglophone group has tended to spend a slightly higher proportion of their national incomes, and of their public budgets, on education than has the Francophone group. Table 6, however, shows that the structure of education costs is different as between the two groups. Notably, average teachers' salaries in the Francophone countries are 50 per cent higher, relative to per capita incomes, than those in the Anglophone group, at both primary and secondary levels. Owing to the importance of teachers' salaries in total educational costs, this difference would have major budgetary implications, if it were not for the fact that primary school pupil/teacher ratios in Francophone countries have also typically been about 50 per cent higher than in Anglophone countries - thereby making unit costs roughly similar as between the two groups. Nevertheless, the high level of teacher costs in some African countries imposes constraints on the expansion of the system at reasonable levels of quality. Priorities for reform are likely to reflect these national differences in cost structures.

## **5. The Aid Record**

The achievement of SFA in Africa - universal enrolment of girls and boys in primary schools of an acceptable quality - is a high development priority. The successful use of aid funds, in support of this goal, could bring high social and economic returns for the countries concerned. Although this is increasingly recognized both within and outside SSA, action has lagged intent and the extent to which aid monies have been reallocated in this direction remains modest on the part of many aid agencies.

An examination of long-term trends in aid to education in developing countries as a whole suggests some disturbing facts. The aggregate picture is summarized in Table 7. It shows that education was accorded far less priority by bilateral aid agencies during the 1980s and 1990s than had been the case in earlier years. The proportion of aid allocated to education fell from 17 per cent in the mid-1970s to around 11 per cent



in the late 1980s, and to less than 10 per cent over the years 1990-94. The final two columns of the table show the values of total and of educational aid in constant 1990 prices. Whilst aid to education in 1975 amounted to about \$5.5 billions it had fallen to about \$3.8 billions by 1985, and only regained its 1975 level again in 1988/89.

Subsequently the downward trend recommenced, with the real value of aid to education falling each year from 1988 to 1993. Thus, even though the real value of development assistance, taken as a whole, almost doubled between 1975 and 1992, that of aid to education actually fell by 16 per cent over the same years.

## AID TO EDUCATION

Table 7 *Official development assistance from OECD countries: education and total flows*

	current prices (\$USbn.)			constant 1990 prices (\$USbn.)	
	Total aid (1)	Aid to education (2)	(2) as % of (1) (3)	Total aid (4)	Aid to education (5)
1970	7.0	1.1	15.7	22.6	3.5
1975	13.9	2.4	17.3	32.0	5.5
1980	27.3	3.4	12.5	43.1	5.4
1985	29.4	3.2	10.9	35.3	3.8
1986	36.7	4.0	10.9	42.9	4.7
1987	41.6	4.4	10.6	47.1	5.0
1988	48.1	5.3	11.0	52.5	5.8
1989	45.7	5.3	11.5	47.7	5.5
1990	53.0	5.2	9.8	53.0	5.2
1991	56.7	4.9	8.7	54.1	4.7
1992	60.9	5.1	8.4	57.0	4.6
1993	56.5	5.4	9.5	51.8	4.9
1994	59.2	n.a.	n.a.	51.7	n.a.
1995	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Sources: OECD Development Co-Operation: Efforts and Policies of the members of the Development Assistance Committees. Annual Reports  
 Deflator used is the U.S. GDP deflator, International Financial Statistics  
 Yearbook 1996

As regards the composition of bilateral educational aid, a surprisingly small proportion of it has supported basic education. Although time series data are not available, a compilation of data for 1990 revealed<sup>8</sup> that amongst the 11 agencies reporting (accounting for two-thirds of bilateral aid transfers for education in that year) aid to basic education represented only 12 per cent of the total value of their educational aid. Amongst them, only three (USAID, the Netherlands and SIDA) provided substantial support to basic education (>\$50 m.), devoting 43 per cent, 16 per cent and 54 per

<sup>8</sup> See Carr-Hill and King 1992:20

cent of their educational aid to basic education, respectively. New Zealand also allocated 63 per cent of its educational support to basic education, amounting to some \$21m. in 1990. Other agencies, by contrast, allocated less than 10 per cent of their funds to basic programmes.

As regards the types of basic education attracting support, the two largest funders in 1990 (USAID and SIDA) allocated 80-90 per cent of their funds to primary schooling. The Netherlands, New Zealand and Switzerland, on the other hand, whilst giving priority to basic education, allocated the majority of their support to adult literacy and other non-formal programmes, rather than to primary schooling.

The downward trend in support to education from DAC member states, discussed above, was mitigated somewhat during the 1980s by an increase in World Bank lending for education, as shown in Table 8. However, much of this increase was not relevant to SSA, nor to the poorer countries in other regions, since over half of Bank lending for education was on close to commercial terms. Nevertheless, IDA funds for education increased substantially, at least until 1990-3, to levels equivalent to about 20 per cent of the total value of other concessional aid flows to education. More recently, however, World Bank lending, and IDA support within it, has fallen back in real terms, such that, by 1996 the IDA element amounted to little more than two-thirds of its real value three years earlier. Furthermore, the proportion of Bank lending going to SSA has remained small throughout the past decade. For example, in 1991, when lending for education peaked at \$2.2 bn., only 11.8 per cent went to 7 countries of SSA.<sup>9</sup> By 1996, when lending for education had dropped to \$1.7 bn. only 9 per cent of this went to 6 countries in SSA.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, notwithstanding the facts that IDA support to education has been higher in the 1990s than earlier, only a fairly small proportion of this has benefited the countries of SSA.

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<sup>9</sup> The detailed data are shown in Colclough with Lewin, 1993: 247.

<sup>10</sup> Calculated from information given in World Bank 1996.



Table 8 *World Bank education lending*

Fiscal year	Education lending (\$m. current)		Proportion of total allocated to primary schooling (%)
	Total	IDA	
1963-9	34.8	n.a.	0.0
1970-4	163.0	n.a.	4.5
1975-80	353.6	n.a.	14.2
1981-5	692.2	200.0	22.4
1986-9	776.8	324.0	27.8
1989	890.7	449.0	31.0
1990	1,486.6	956.5	24.0
1991	2,251.1	736.2	36.0
1992	1,883.7	584.1	n.a.
1993	2,006.2	1,038.2	n.a.
1994	2,068.0	658.1	n.a.
1995	2,096.8	816.2	n.a.
1996	1,705.7	784.9	n.a.

Sources: World Bank *Annual Report for years shown*

Support from other multilaterals for education is small by comparison with that from the World Bank, and has been equivalent only to about 10 per cent of Bank funding. However, a high priority is given to basic education within multilateral programmes: it has typically accounted for over one-third of UNESCO and World Bank programmes, and for all of UNICEF's educational support in recent years (see Table 8 and Carr-Hill and King 1992:21). Almost all of this multilateral finance was, in 1991, allocated to primary schooling, rather than to other basic education programmes.

There are no regularly published statistics which allow investigation of the geographical distribution of aid flows to education, and to basic education in particular. However, a survey organised in 1991 allowed some assessment of the changing pattern of educational aid to Africa over the preceding decade (King and Carr-Hill 1992). This revealed that annual bilateral aid to education in Africa had increased by 50 per cent in real terms (to reach just over \$1bn) over the decade to 1990/1, and that aid to basic education had increased over seven-fold, in real terms, over the same period. These increases were dominated by changes in policy in some of the larger donors - marked not only by substantially increased allocations for education but by changes in the priority of basic education within programmes (particularly so for USAID, which quadrupled the value of education aid to Africa over the 1980s, and raised the proportion going to basic education from 7 per cent to 58 per cent by 1990/1). Although there were wide variations between individual donors, for most, the proportion of educational aid going to basic education in Africa



was higher than in other regions,<sup>11</sup> and there was every indication that most intended to increase both these absolute and relative amounts still further.

As indicated earlier, there are few firm data which reveal the changes in the extent of aid support to basic education post 1990/1. However, a survey conducted by UNESCO, as part of the preparations for the mid-decade review of EFA, does provide some qualitative evidence for the extent to which external support has changed (UNESCO 1996c). Data provided by nine bilateral donors indicated that there had been an overall increase in financial commitments and disbursements to basic education since 1990, and that its share as a percentage of all assistance to education had also risen. Substantial increases were reported by Australia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, and the Netherlands. Sweden remained roughly unchanged whilst declines were reported for Belgium and the USA. Declining financial support to basic education from Canada over 1991-4 was set to change with a new policy reasserting basic education as a priority, introduced in 1995.

A more recent survey of bilateral agencies confirms both that real aid transfers for basic education and their proportionate importance relative to all educational aid, have increased sharply since 1990/1 (Bennell 1997). Although the increases have as yet been concentrated amongst relatively few agencies, others have committed themselves to increasing their support, and a rising aid trend can be expected over the next few years.

Most donors allocate the greater part of their support for basic education to primary schooling, rather than to literacy or other non-formal programmes. OECD data suggest that bilateral support to primary schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa doubled as a proportion of total education aid over the 1980s, whereas the proportionate importance of aid to non-formal education was halved. More recently, during the period 1990-1995, aid to primary schooling, relative to that for basic education as a whole, increased for 7 out of 10 bilateral donors supplying the data - sometimes substantially so.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> An exception at that time was UK. Although the amount of support provided by ODA to primary education tripled (to about \$9m.) between 1989 and 1991, with its proportional importance rising from about 5% to 14% of total educational aid, the increase was entirely a product of support to one major project in Andhra Pradesh, India. British aid to primary schooling in Africa appeared actually to decline over those years. See Lewin 1994: 162.

<sup>12</sup> Calculated from Bennell 1997, Tables 8 and 9.



These trends may well reflect the growing acceptance over recent years of the importance of primary schooling as a means of securing a range of development goals. They may also, however, be a consequence of it being more difficult to increase rapidly donor support for NFE programmes. School systems can be substantial and quick absorbers of financial resources, which is not always the case with NFE.

The UNESCO survey also confirmed that primary schooling remains the major component receiving donor support under the umbrella of basic education. Funding for educational materials, school buildings and curriculum development is common. Training and professional support for teachers is another important target for many donors, with Sweden, Japan, Norway, Finland, France, Germany, USA, Denmark and the Netherlands being cited. The survey provides no evidence on recent changes in the geographical distribution of aid to basic education. However, since SSA is widely known to be facing greater problems in basic education than other developing country regions, it is almost certain that the global trends revealed by the mid-decade review imply that increased support to basic education in SSA has been forthcoming over the years since the Jomtien conference - although not yet on the scale needed to achieve SFA within five to ten years.

## **6. Aid Coordination**

The literature is replete with examples of the undesirable effects of a lack of coordination in aid programming. In many countries the provision of resources from abroad has appeared not to be guided by any identifiable and coherent set of objectives. This has been particularly true in Africa, where:

‘the public investment programme has become little more than the aggregation of projects that donors wish to finance. These projects have not always been consistent with the priorities necessary for achieving national development objectives. Donors finance the projects that spending ministries and agencies want, but these wants are seldom coordinated by the core ministries’ (World Bank 1984:41).

Although written more than a decade ago, the generalisation remains true of much of Africa. Ironically, part of this problem is induced by the process of aid-giving. The demands imposed by a large number of agencies upon small recipient administrations, can be considerable, and are capable of diverting scarce resources from more



important applications. Moreover, not only is donor activity often not coordinated, but it is actually marked by competitive behaviour, (e.g. competitively bidding for a small pool of qualified counterpart staff, or for high profile projects in fashionable sectors) which sets up new cycles of wasted resources and opportunity (Cassen et.al 1994:177)

### 6.1 *Potential Benefits of Aid Coordination*

Aid coordination can improve the efficiency of development programming in a number of ways. In its absence, the large number of donors operating in many countries can lead to a duplication of programmes and of project preparation work, a proliferation of missions which replicate what others have done, and a duplication of meetings with the recipient government, with senior officials having to repeat the answers to similar questions posed by many different visitors. Thus, aid coordination is needed in order to optimize both the information available to both donors and recipients, and the process whereby it is obtained.

A second benefit, related to the first, stems from the systematizing of information, analytical studies and data sets which is a requirement of proper aid coordination. As Sack (1993) argues, this can bring special benefits by helping to create a consensus about what needs to be done, which would remain absent where the generation of analytic and policy work arises in an *ad hoc* fashion, and in order to meet the particular or occasional needs of individual donors.

A further set of benefits relate to the improvement of aid effectiveness. This should partly be a product of a closer integration of the aid budget and the development budgets. Ideally, the provision of aid to a country should be treated as a net addition to government resources from whatever source. Its presence allows a greater amount of spending to occur than would otherwise be possible, and thus allows a set of the next most desirable projects to be implemented than would otherwise occur.

Coordination should facilitate the use of aid monies to prioritised projects nationally, in ways which truly reflect development needs rather than the priorities of individual agencies themselves.

Coordination should also facilitate a much greater possibility of recognizing the different comparative advantages (and costs) of different donors in supplying particular types of assistance. Expertise varies sharply between agencies and countries. This



should be recognized in allocating responsibilities for particular types of educational support. Equally, costs differ substantially - from full grant terms with no tying (as with some of the Scandinavian programmes) to close to commercial loans. From the perspective of the recipient, cost minimisation strategies would require the careful comparison of relative merits of seeking funding and/or expertise from different potential sources. Such choices could be operationalised only in the context of a serious aid coordination framework.

## 6.2 *Recent Trends in Aid Coordination*

During the 1980s and 1990s the most important institutions for achieving the coordination of aid programming have been the Consultative Groups (mainly under the aegis of the World Bank) and, for the poorest countries, Roundtables, which have been organized by the UNDP.

The former have increased in influence, particularly as the role of policy conditionality has grown and increasingly underpinned structural adjustment loans (SALs) from the Bank. In these fora, the World Bank, participating aid donors and the IMF meet with the recipient government, often on an annual basis, to review its macroeconomic performance and opportunities for improvement (as judged by the Bank). Programmes of external financing and aid resources are agreed as part of this process. The extensive preparations for the meetings have provided the occasion for private discussions between senior officials of the recipient country and the Bank, and many follow-up discussions between the government and other donors are based on the Bank's critiques.

As a result of these developments the influence of the Bank has increased enormously, and in two particular ways: first, it now affects both the objectives and the conduct of economic policy in Africa much more directly than in earlier decades, via the conditionality imposed upon governments in receipt of SALs. Second, many bilateral donors have found it convenient to associate themselves with the economic and technical work produced by the Bank, and have, either formally or informally, supported the conditionalities associated with external financing by determining the size and type of their own aid interventions partly in their light. More generally both bilateral and multilateral donors have proved willing to supply additional assistance to countries which have agreed to embark upon fundamental policy reforms in ways indicated as being desirable by the Bank (and the IMF).



### 6.3 *Pressures Protecting the Status Quo*

Notwithstanding the recently increased influence of the Bank in these processes, there is widespread agreement in the literature that, unless the recipient takes a firm grasp of the aid process, coordination will not take place, or will at best reflect only the donors' priorities (Cassen et. al. 1994:Ch 7; Williams 1995). There are, of course, examples of countries where the initiative for coordination resides firmly with the recipient government (including, from Africa, Botswana, Mauritius, and, increasingly, South Africa). But there are many others - particularly in SSA - where this is still not the case and where the negative impact of an unorganised aid dialogue, alluded to above, continues. Why is this so, when the arguments for coordination are so strong?

There are pressures here from both sides. As to the donors:

- to the extent that one implicit purpose of aid remains the furtherance of donors' own commercial and political interests, one might expect that the increased rationality in the allocation of aid which should emerge from greater coordination, would tend to make the realization of that implicit purpose more difficult.
- not all donors are comfortable with either the extent or content of the conditionality imposed on Africa by the multilateral financial institutions. Thus, as King (1991: 18) also observes, some donors do not welcome the risks of increased dominance by the Bank over bilateral aid policies which may be associated with greater aid coordination.

As to the recipients:

- just as some donors are unwilling to strengthen further the hegemony of the Bank in the aid dialogue, so many aid recipients fear that greater coordination of aid can only strengthen the voice of the donors as regards the conduct of their own domestic policy. Greater aid coordination inevitably reduces the leverage of recipient governments to play the interests of one donor off against those of another, and, at least under some forms of coordination, it can reduce the freedom of recipients to choose which aid source to use for which purpose.

Nevertheless, whilst the above pressures may help to explain past failures, it is becoming increasingly apparent that what both sides have to gain in achieving greater coordination is considerably greater than what they have to lose.



#### 6.4 *What is Required?*

For any recipient country, the critical requirement for an effective aid coordination system is the creation of a strong central unit, closely linked to the Ministry of Finance and the budgetary process, and having an overview of the aid process. This unit would have responsibility for producing an aid budget, fully linked to the government's recurrent and capital accounts, on the basis of submissions from sectoral ministries and national development priorities; it would have responsibility for all aid negotiations and for reporting on the use and allocation of aid funds. Only where such a strong central capacity exists can recipient governments exercise the control over the aid process which is required to ensure minimal duplication of effort and to promote the most effective use of available funds. Moves in these directions have been taken in recent years. However it remains the case that in many African countries aid coordination mechanisms are very weak. Too much responsibility still lies with the donors, with the result that domestic development priorities - being insufficiently articulated - have less influence upon aid allocations than ought to be the case.

Consideration of particular sectors raises additional issues of coordination - particularly so in the case of education, where many donors wish to be involved, and where the need to ensure consistency between different initiatives is particularly important. For example, support to education is conducive to micro approaches - small charitable organisations may send a parcel of books, a scholarship, or some teaching aids. Yet whether these are truly helpful depends critically upon their consistency with the curriculum objectives of the education system as a whole. Equally, the close linkages between education, culture and language imply that the use of technical cooperation (TC) in educational aid programmes may be particularly problematic. This is in spite of the fact that a high proportion of TC expenditures are targeted, in one way or another, on the education sector, notwithstanding the different approaches to pedagogy, curriculum development, education management - and even values and language - which hold in different countries. The facts that education projects can be small scale, and that the technologies involved appear to be easily accessible, make them more attractive to small donors, including NGOs, than those in many other sectors. The resulting wide range of sources of assistance for education is welcome, but it brings considerable problems of coordination.



Where a strong central aid coordinating unit is successfully established within the recipient government the backing of a competent planning function located in each of the sectoral ministries will also be required. Accordingly, in order to help the recipient coordinate the aid process in education (as in other sectors), the planning and budgeting function within the ministry may need to be developed, so as to ensure that the work and negotiations undertaken by the central aid policy unit are as effective as possible.

Notwithstanding the success or otherwise of aid coordination by recipient governments, there is often a separate case for coordination efforts being made amongst donors themselves. This is particularly so where donors have shifted increasingly from the provision of project to programme support. An example is provided by USAID, which, since 1988 has taken a new approach to supporting educational development in Africa. Its Education Sector Support (ESS) approach has eschewed project-based assistance, in favour of providing broad support to reforms of the education system itself. The aim has been to move away from attempts to provide solutions to specific educational problems, towards helping education managers identify and remedy their own problems in education.

The efforts of other donors, and the nature of their assistance, are reported to have played an important role in determining the success of the ESS approach (USAID 1995:35-6, 83-4). In Guinea and in Lesotho the World Bank and USAID jointly developed mutually reinforcing conditionality, and worked together in promoting policy dialogue and in conducting performance reviews. Similarly in Uganda and Ghana, the two agencies are reported to have coordinated their financing, technical assistance and policy input so as to support government strategies and to complement each other.

More generally, the provision of educational programme support prefaced by policy dialogue and with associated policy conditionalities, would seem to presuppose that all participating donors agree about what the 'right' educational policies should be, and about what conditionalities the recipient ought to be expected to accept. Otherwise the conditions and performance criteria attached by different donors could easily conflict with each other. It is difficult to see how such agreement could be achieved, in any genuine sense, in the absence of a high degree of coordination, information exchange, discussion and debate amongst the donors themselves. In practice,



however, such debate has occurred less frequently and less substantially than it might, owing to the *de facto* hegemony of the Bank - a consequence both of its financial muscle and of the substantial analytic resources which it typically marshalls to provide background and underpinning for its policy stance in particular countries. Even if smaller bilateral agencies disagree with the extent or content of conditionality proposed by the Bank, it is often difficult for them to counter the depth and quantity of documentation produced by the Bank in support of its own case. Indeed, they sometimes appear to find it as mesmeric as do many recipient countries themselves.

## **7. Dependency versus Sustainability**

Reducing dependence and improving sustainability are opposite sides of the same coin. In order to be sustainable, development must be increasingly reliant upon indigenous human, institutional and financial resources and capabilities. Helping the process of development by using foreign resources - which is what aid does - can thus only lead to sustainable development if it helps to create the indigenous resources to maintain the initiative in future. Traditionally, aid has been expected to do this in a number of ways:

- training and education is the main way of strengthening skills and capacities. Aid can support this process either systemically (via support to schools and training institutions) or individually via technical cooperation;
- aid can help to support institutional growth and development;
- to the extent that aid promotes economic growth, so the financial resource base of the government would be strengthened, and domestic resources could increasingly be substituted for those from abroad.

As indicated below, the extent to which aid to education has, in fact, promoted these objectives, however, has been mixed.



### *7.1 The Shift from Project to Programme Approaches and its Implications for Sustainability*

One of the more obvious trends in educational aid over the 1980s and 1990s has been the shift from project to programme funding. This has not been confined only to the multilateral agencies - although there the change has been sharpest. Bilateral aid agencies have also increasingly provided general programme support, often with important recurrent funding characteristics, in ways which would have been unthinkable during the 1970s. What explains this shift, and has it made recipients more or less dependent upon the continuation of the aid process than would otherwise have been the case?

Some commentators judge the increasing emphasis upon programme support to have been mainly a response to the weakening of the infrastructure and of the institutional capacities of education ministries, which followed from the economic and adjustment crises facing many African countries. On this interpretation (e.g. King 1991:15; Carr-Hill 1993), programme funding was made necessary in order to protect the viability of earlier project initiatives - because recipient governments were increasingly unable to provide the infrastructural and local cost support necessary for effective project implementation. This tendency often led to 'enclave' projects where donors provided their own office accommodation, transport, supplies, housing, etc., so as to prevent more general shortages and malfunctioning services affecting the success of the project (Gustafsson 1990). An unfortunate consequence of this kind of approach is that dependence upon continued donor involvement is often increased: projects which depend upon 'enclave' services cannot be integrated into the rest of the system unless and until the rest of the infrastructure is able to operate at a similar standard to that in the 'enclave'. Donors may thus find themselves locked in to providing long-term support to projects, the responsibility for which it had been their intention to pass on to the local administration.

A more important and direct prompt for the move to programme funding was the perception that the most critical changes needed in many countries suffering from deteriorating economic conditions - especially those in Sub-Saharan Africa - concerned the redesign of macro and sectoral policies. Just as SALs were used by the Bank as sources of conditional finance tied to the redesign of national economic policies, so Sector Adjustment Loans (SECALs), introduced in 1989, were used in education (and



other sectors) to support comprehensive reforms in a country's education system. But the change was not limited only to those countries undergoing structural adjustment. Elsewhere, Sector Investment Loans (SECILs) were also linked to the achievement of key policy and institutional objectives. Designed to finance part of the country's educational investment programme (unlike SECALs, which could also be used to support recurrent expenditures), the responsibility for detailed project design, appraisal and supervision was transferred to the borrower. Thus, helping to get the policy framework right was increasingly seen as more important to the effective allocation and use of aid funds, than was involvement in the details of the project preparation and review processes. Fredriksen (1990) reports three reasons for these changes: first, it is obvious that projects will fail unless they operate in the context of well-formulated national policies; second, the tension between national budgetary constraints and increasing social demand (implied, at minimum, by population growth) places a strong premium on the efficiency of resource use; third, justifications for increased education expenditures will only be convincing if policies to improve effectiveness and efficiency are in place. Accordingly similar arguments to those which had been used in favour of policy-based lending at the macro level were increasingly employed in support of similar approaches to aid policy in education in Sub-Saharan Africa, and elsewhere.

A third factor encouraging the shift to programme support stemmed from more directly practical considerations than either of the above. This was simply that if the volume of aid to education was to shift away from an emphasis upon small-scale innovative projects towards more broadly based support to the sector as a whole - and increasingly, within it, towards primary schooling - a programme approach would be required if the donors were not to be swamped by the sheer quantity of project evaluative work which would be otherwise needed. Moreover, as lending to the 'human development' sectors increased, in some of the poorest countries a high proportion of total education (and health) expenditures came to be financed on aid terms. Under these pressures, the modalities for aid had to change - and earlier sensitivities about the potentially 'neocolonial' influence of policy dialogue were replaced by a realistic (if not exactly welcomed) acceptance on the part of recipients that policy conditionality was a necessary *quid pro quo* for enhanced capital and recurrent aid to education.

Returning to the conditions for sustainability mentioned earlier - securing an increased reliance upon indigenous human, institutional and financial resources - it would seem



that these recent trends in the modalities of educational aid have had an ambiguous effect. On the one hand, if aid to education had increased both in real per capita terms, and as a proportion of total sectoral expenditures, aid dependence would have increased, and sustainability would have been reduced. However, we have seen that although total aid flows have increased in real terms over the last two decades, those to education have fallen - substantially so on a per capita basis. Nevertheless, real domestic expenditures on education in Africa have fallen at an even faster rate, such that the extent of dependence within SSA on aid to education as a proportion of total public expenditures has probably increased - and quite sharply so in the poorest nations.

On the other hand the shift from project towards programme funding is welcome from a number of other perspectives which relate to sustainability criteria. The reduced donor involvement in project assessment has shifted some power and authority from donor to recipient. To the extent that these processes are now exclusively national responsibilities - albeit with the expectation that proper standards of expenditure control and accountability will be maintained - so capacity building will have been promoted and aid dependence will tend to have been reduced. Equally, to the extent that the policy dialogue has been genuinely participatory, rather than being characterised by the imposition of conditions from abroad, so too may sustainability have been promoted rather than undermined. On balance it is difficult to judge where the net tendency lies - and it will undoubtedly have varied, within Sub-Saharan Africa, from country to country: the least confident and least skilled administrations will probably have gained fewer benefits from the process than the rest. It is, however, possible, on the basis of this experience to suggest some conditions which, if satisfied, would help the process of sustainable development in the context of continued aid flows to education. These are discussed below.

## 7.2 *Conditions for Improved Sustainability*

It seems clear that significantly increased support to primary schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa is likely to continue to require not only improved implementation capacity, but also the introduction of national policy reforms. In many developing countries, national education systems are hidebound, poorly managed, and staffed by people who are ill-suited to dealing with the demands of reform and innovation. In these circumstances, a number of conditions become important to the sustainability of donor-supported programmes.



A first condition is the introduction of domestic policies which will allow the sustainability of the improved system in the longer term. In some countries a very high proportion of development expenditure in education has been financed by foreign aid. Yet such levels of support have not always been assessed in the light of the financial capacity of the government to service the recurrent implications of the expansion of the system which the aid programme allows.<sup>13</sup> Thus, if external assistance to education is to be consistent with sustainability criteria, the medium term recurrent implications of such support need to be specified, and donors would need to be confident that these will be able to be met by the recipient government - at least over the medium term.

This should not be taken to imply any reservations of principle concerning the notion of external financing of recurrent costs. Indeed the increased willingness of donors to support recurrent spending, including teachers' salaries, has been critically important to achieving increased funding of primary systems in SSA in recent years. This is because the major financial constraints faced by governments in the primary sector concern recurrent funding: buildings are often better and more cheaply provided using local labour, materials and design standards, and external funding of school structures has, in the past, often been associated with unfortunate escalations of costs. A number of agencies - including the aid ministries of the Netherlands, Sweden, and Germany, and the World Bank, the ADB, and UNICEF - have recognized the desirability of supporting recurrent spending. Usually, however, such support is expected to be finite, and provided in the context of a clear sectoral plan on a declining basis. This is a symptom of the fact that donors are aware of the dangers of encouraging dependency upon continued budgetary support from abroad. It also recognizes the fact that donors themselves are subject to periodic financial scrutiny which militates against their undertaking financial obligations for programmes of support which may stretch into the indefinite future. These constraints on donors are unlikely to change. External recurrent support for primary systems will, however, continue to be desirable in a good number of African countries for at least the next decade - or until the goals of SFA are within closer reach. The continued provision of such support will probably require

<sup>13</sup> As Penrose (1993:18) points out, development programmes have often tended to be adjusted to a level permitted by available foreign exchange, and additional resources for meeting local costs have often had to come from inflationary sources. In these circumstances, for donors to ignore the recurrent implications of aid projects will not necessarily mean that the projects fail or that they will be abandoned, but if not, the possibility of sound fiscal policies being pursued by the recipient government may well be undermined.



agreement with host governments concerning, on the one hand, system reforms to ensure that sufficient services of reasonable quality can be delivered so as to improve welfare, and, on the other, financial or structural reforms to ensure that an expanded, higher quality system can be financed from domestic resources over the longer term.

The second condition is simply that recipient administrations must genuinely support the policy changes which underpin the reform programmes. A World Bank evaluation notes:

‘Intervention at the sector level succeeded best when it was preceded by well-articulated studies that examined the problems and options and carefully addressed the political aspects of reform. Ideally, these studies should be done in cooperation with the borrower’s administration so that maximum consensus is built into policy changes ... Conditionalties that did not have strong political support from the borrower did not work’ (World Bank 1988: 13, 19)

Thus a belief, on the part of the recipient, that it will be important to continue with the programmes and with the policies upon which they depend, would seem to be a prior requirement for their sustainability in the event of donor support being withdrawn. Although this condition cannot be secured *pre hoc*, it requires at least that donors receive assurances from recipients that such would be their reaction in the event of donor withdrawal.

The commitment of the recipient government to policy change is likely to be influenced strongly by the strength of conditionality sought by donors, and by the extent to which recipient administrations have participated in their design. As Berg (1991) points out, there is often a lack of technical consensus as to what solutions will work in a given context. In such circumstances, allowing some flexibility in the conditions imposed - emphasising the process of reform rather more than insisting on particular outcomes - would recognize the room for valid technical debate, and would increase the likelihood of the recipient becoming committed to the reform process. The role of policy dialogue is also critical to gaining recipient support. Policy options which are properly debated with the recipient government, and which are amended in the light of serious local opinion, stand a much greater chance of being implemented



than do those which are externally imposed and accepted merely for the purpose of securing funding (Fredriksen 1990). This conclusion also emerges from a number of assessments of the process of policy reform, each of which indicate that government commitment to a reform programme is a more important determinant of successful implementation than donor pressure simply imposed via conditionality (See White 1990, McCleary 1991, Rondinelli 1993, USAID 1995b).

A third condition is the existence of adequate management capacity within the recipient administration so as to allow the programmes to continue. If such capacity were not present at the outset, it would need to be an important donor objective to create and sustain it within the programme. Although this has traditionally been tackled by the use of technical cooperation - the process has often been a failure, particularly in Africa. The reasons for such failure are many and complex. Often, however, TC has actually tended to increase rather than decrease patterns of dependence: where TC has involved the supply of skilled workers from abroad, local skills have sometimes been overlooked or displaced; expatriate staff have often focussed much more upon the operational aspect of their responsibilities to the neglect of the training aspects; even where training was seriously attempted, the social costs of foreign culture, consumption standards and aspirations have often undermined the effectiveness of skill acquisition on the part of counterpart staff; inappropriate technology has sometimes been transferred; finally, TC has often provided a means whereby the recipient government could avoid taking responsibility for failure where it occurred (a full discussion of these issues is given in Colclough 1992).

An additional important weakness of much TC has been that it has been project-related, rather than being focussed upon improving institutional competence in a much broader sense. Traditional project design assumes that training and technical advice will produce the institutional changes required to manage reform. Yet, in fact, such traditional models have done little to strengthen the development competence of developing country institutions - they have more usually propped up flawed institutions than they have reformed them for self-sufficiency. Thus, institutional reform can actually be hampered by TC, since governments can thereby be excused the responsibility of allocating their own scarce financial and human resources to the



function in question, or because those national staff who work within the project may have little ownership of work executed by foreigners.

Given the resources and effort that have been allocated to the TC process in the past it would be presumptuous to suggest that there are easy answers. However, if self-sufficiency is to be facilitated, and aid-dependence to be reduced, the major aim must be for donors not to take primary responsibility for the performance of particular education services via the provision of TC, but rather to help develop an institutional capacity that is capable of providing such services, and, indeed, of undertaking systemic educational reform.

## **8. Other Lessons from Past Practice**

Although things are now beginning to change, it is important to recall that, historically the amount of direct aid to primary schooling has been tiny. Even by 1986, the primary sector only received about 5 per cent of total educational aid: although World Bank priorities had by then begun to shift, other agencies were proving less flexible. Accordingly it is only over the last few years that questions about the relevance of different modalities for providing support to the sector have been posed. This is particularly true of SSA. Although we have seen that aid to primary schooling in SSA appears to have increased since 1990, there is little documentation available on these trends - nor have the lessons of such support been systematically evaluated. These lacunae somewhat hamper the task of abstracting implications for future policy.

Nevertheless, it is widely agreed that the general aim of aid policy for primary schooling in SSA should be to help promote equitable access to schools of good quality. Broadly speaking, this means that in most countries aid should help to expand primary systems, to support measures for their effective utilisation (including measures to stimulate demand- such as by reducing the direct and opportunity costs of schooling for girls) and to help improve school quality. Exactly how best to do this will depend upon the history and current conditions in each country. Pre-packaged solutions - even more so in primary education than in other sectors - are extremely unlikely to succeed.



This has not always been recognized in the past. When, in the mid-to-late 1980s aid agencies did begin to change their views as regards the importance of supporting primary schooling, they began their involvement, not surprisingly, by doing the things which they knew best how to do. Three characteristics of their programmes stand out. First, the financing of hardware (buildings, furniture, equipment) accounted for almost 30 per cent of total aid to primary schooling over 1980-86 (and for almost 40 per cent of that provided for the poorer countries). Second, expenditure on books and teaching materials was initially extremely modest, accounting for less than 5 per cent of aid to primary schooling overall. Third, recurrent support was initially provided only to the richer countries - whilst the countries of SSA received insignificant amounts of such support.<sup>14</sup> It will be clear from earlier sections of this paper that these priorities were inappropriate. At that time, procurement and disbursement procedures were relatively inflexible, and large scale capital assistance to the primary sector ran the risk of over-design of school buildings, often producing higher cost schools than were either necessary or desirable. In general, only where some strategic objective needed to be attained, such as the correction of regional inequalities, the provision of school storerooms or toilet facilities etc., should assistance have been rigidly tied to capital expenditures. On the other hand expenditures on school books and materials would have been highly beneficial to the quality of schooling. And, more generally, the major financing problems of achieving SFA in Africa have always concerned recurrent rather than capital spending. Thus the early revealed priorities of aid agencies, in supporting primary schooling in Africa, appeared to be precisely the wrong way round.

It is instructive to ask whether these priorities have changed, by examining the more recent policies of the two major funders of primary schooling in SSA - the World Bank and USAID. As regards the World Bank, there is evidence that the design of projects supported in the primary sector has changed in ways which better reflect true sectoral priorities. The main difference is that there has been an attempt not only to provide capital facilities, but, within the same projects, also to respond to many of the important determinants of school effectiveness which tend to be absent in particular African settings. Primary education projects supported by the Bank were assessed in

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<sup>14</sup> These data are from World Bank 1991: Table A17.



26 countries (Heneveld and Craig 1996). In nineteen of these, the construction of schools, teachers' colleges or teachers' housing remained an important part of the Bank's support. However, there were conscious efforts to avoid over-design. Training for people from local communities, the preparation and publication of construction manuals, and 'low-cost' building designs, were all included in many of the projects. More importantly, however, project components increasingly address many of the factors known to affect educational outcomes - textbook supply, teacher training, curriculum reform, methods of examination, teaching materials. These inputs, which had largely been ignored in aid to primary systems ten years earlier, were increasingly included as packages, in ways which appeared to recognize the importance of the linkages between them, if the quality of the schooling process is to be improved.

However, the same assessment finds that recent lending to primary schooling in Africa by the Bank attends to only part of the task of improving quality. Most projects paid little or no attention to in-school teacher training, to ways of improving the school climate (teacher attitudes, the links between curriculum expectations and teacher behaviour, rewards and incentives for students etc.), nor to ways of improving the teaching/learning process in the classroom. This finding leads the authors to conclude that the Bank's more recent approach to supporting primary schooling in Africa - though much improved in comparison with earlier times - concentrates too much upon system-wide measures that respond to policy decisions, and upon large-scale programming that serves system needs more directly than it serves the needs at the level of the individual school.

It is clear that the timely supply of needed inputs on a recurrent basis is by no means the last piece in the jigsaw. Of critical importance to the business of ensuring that these inputs have a positive impact upon school quality is to achieve their effective **use** by teachers and pupils in the classroom. However, whether or not the authors of the Bank study are right to argue that these latter aspects should also be taken on board by aid agencies as part of project design, is a matter for debate. The changes needed in order to achieve such outcomes will be mainly a result of a process of policy reform rather than of any externally provided resource inputs. This may be one reason why an



inspection of project documents themselves would be likely to reveal no obvious mechanisms whereby Bank support would lead to the resolution of such problems.

As indicated earlier in this paper, the World Bank has been increasingly moving towards programme funding, via the use of SECALs and SECILs, designed and agreed in the context of a much broader debate about educational objectives and policies. The project mode *per se*, therefore, is becoming less critical in determining the architecture of Bank lending to the primary sector. This has also been increasingly true in the case of USAID, since the introduction of its Education Sector Support (ESS) programme in the late 1980s.

The aims of USAID basic education programmes in SSA are to promote broad, systemic policy and institutional changes and to pursue the general objective of equitable access to better quality basic primary schooling. The main form of support is non-project assistance, disbursed to governments in tranches when mutually established conditions are met. These conditions reflect the implementation of key policy, institutional and expenditure reforms. A number of common elements can be identified:

- Assistance aims to support a nationally defined and led process of reform.
- Budgetary support is conditional upon performance, according to agreed terms, with disbursement of each tranche being dependent upon performance targets being met.
- Reform of the entire system is seen as necessary for sustainable improvements
- Institutional development is seen as representing the critical means by which policies are implemented.
- Prior to USAID support, a review of the government's reform strategy and financing is undertaken in conjunction with all major donors. Thus, coordination is seen as crucial to the reform process.
- The effectiveness of the programme is assessed in terms of its measurable impact upon student access and performance.

The ESS approach emerged in response to several factors: first, a general consensus that a systemic approach was required for achieving lasting educational change; second, a recognition that both governments and donors must plan and act within existing resource constraints; third, a renewed acknowledgement of the fundamental role played by basic education in development; and fourth, a willingness to commit relatively large sums of money to basic education in Africa.

The approach has been innovative and important in several respects. Recent evaluations, based upon an assessment of results in 12 countries in SSA, have indicated that ESS works well where the government commitment to reform is strong, where the sectoral strategy is well defined and where the reform agenda does not greatly exceed existing or attainable institutional capacity within the country<sup>15</sup>. By 1993, the main impact of the programme in these countries had been seen at system level: tangible improvements in education policy, institutional operations, school support and community involvement were reported. Changes in student outcomes were expected, but often not yet detectable within the five years of operation of most ESS programmes. Some problems of accountability had emerged: on the one hand, since ESS programmes use the entire national education system as the unit of analysis, agency accounting and reporting systems generally do not capture ESS programme impact; on the other, associating the ESS programme with the entire process of educational reform risks overestimating USAID's role in and control over the reform process and its expected impact. Using this approach it becomes difficult, if not impossible - given the nature of budgetary support, donor collaboration and system-wide reform - to track and directly attribute impacts uniquely to the USAID programme. These latter problems are mainly procedural, however, and should not be seen as fundamental flaws in programme design. They are an inevitable consequence of recognizing that aid agency support needs to extend beyond the level of individual projects, so as to facilitate programmes of national educational renewal and reform.

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<sup>15</sup> See USAID 1995b. For a detailed description of each of the national programmes in SSA see USAID 1995a.



## 9. What Particular Opportunities Face a Small Bilateral Agency?

The size of an agency affects what it might best do along at least two dimensions. Firstly, aid may be less effective if it is very thinly spread across many countries and programmes. Thus, if a relatively small agency aims to have a distinctive - or at least an identifiable - impact on development it may be better to concentrate on a small number of countries. There may be some implicit conflict here with the foreign or commercial policy objectives of aid programmes. Some government officials may believe it to be desirable to have some aid presence in a larger number of countries - for example, in those where strategic foreign policy objectives were judged to be important - even if the resources to underpin a distinctive aid programme were unavailable. To that extent, however, the effectiveness of aid transfers would risk being undermined.

Secondly, the effectiveness of programme design is a function of the quantity and quality of staff resources available, both in headquarters and in the field. If an agency had relatively few staff dealing with education, it would be difficult for them to become authoritative about the educational problems and challenges facing more than a handful of countries. In these circumstances, an effective aid impact again implies a need to keep the number of countries supported fairly small, and even a substantial shift towards supporting basic education in Africa should still be selectively focused upon a manageable portfolio of country programmes, in the light of the staff resources available. This is also the more efficient approach since the unit overheads involved in covering many countries would tend to be high.

It would, of course, be possible to support a larger number of countries if an agency were content to accept World Bank analyses and conditionality as its own touchstone for disbursements and associated conditions. The desirability of this would depend upon the extent to which the agency had full confidence in the Bank's judgements concerning what constitutes best practice. Even if this were generally so, it would still be necessary to determine whether Bank proposals were right for each country, before the agency could decide to be associated with them - with all the risks that that may involve. In practice, therefore, it is hardly possible to short-cut direct involvement in the policy dialogue process, if one wishes responsibly to be associated with its



outcomes. This implies that 'ownership' of the outcomes of policy dialogue is as important for each of the donor parties to the process, as it is for the host government. Thus, the *de facto* leadership of policy dialogue by the World Bank does not seem to weaken the case for smaller donors maintaining a focussed programme of support.

On the other hand, some economies of scale may be available by pursuing donor partnerships with those of like mind - e.g. for Norway, partnerships should be possible with other Scandinavian agencies. As indicated earlier, joint programmes have been found to be valuable by some bilateral agencies supporting basic education in SSA. Such collaboration could bring benefits to the aid programmes of each participating partner, making the whole greater than the sum of its parts. Furthermore, all formal or informal arrangements which can lead to reductions in wasteful competition between aid agencies should be welcomed.

Different project procedures and accounting cycles, however, often pose problems for inter-agency collaboration. This can be as problematic for bilateral arrangements as for achieving more ambitious coordination objectives. For example, there may be a conflict between being part of a Bank-led policy dialogue, and satisfying domestic requirements for accountability in the use of aid funds. Here, careful bureaucratic procedures may need to be developed to track aid monies, and to justify their use *post-hoc*. This was found to be particularly important in the case of the UK (Iredale 1995). For the same reasons there may be a conflict between encouraging aid recipients to accept increased autonomy in project and programme design, and the requirements of accountability to national parliaments for the use of aid funds. A learning process is needed on all sides.

At a more mundane level, negotiation with other donors simply for the purpose of coordinating complimentary actions may not be possible owing to time pressures imposed by the budget cycle, which often differs from country to country. This may necessitate some agencies firming up the content of their programmes at times of the year which do not suit the timetables of others. Here, unilateral decisions as to content may become inevitable.



In general, then, inter-agency coordination brings considerable benefits, but these should not necessarily be sought at the cost of having passively to accept the analytic and policy work conducted by others. Interests, perceptions and values do differ between agencies and countries. There can still be genuine debate about what constitutes best practice, in a technical sense, in different economic and cultural environments. It is therefore important that commitment to particular policy outcomes is genuinely held by all partners, no matter how tempting it may be to acknowledge the analytic prowess of the Bank, and to delegate responsibility for the policy debate to that institution.

There are three other principles which are important, notwithstanding the outcome of coordination endeavours. First, there is a need to be clear about comparative advantage, as well as recipient needs. In the case of Norway, it is necessary to ask what are the particular strengths offered by the country, in terms of support for primary schooling in Africa. This may be as much to do with the mechanics of the aid programme (flexibility, grant terms, no tying, lack of requirement for counterpart finance, ability to carry over funds etc.) in comparison with those of others, as with the quality of Norwegian expertise in basic education.

Secondly, there is a need to have a longer planning framework than has traditionally been the case: a decade or more is needed in order to see the real results of policy reforms and of better resourcing in the schools. Domestic politics may militate against this, but the argument for long term support and for patience in seeking the expected outcomes, needs to be made.

Thirdly, whether acting alone, or as part of a collaborative programme, it would be useful to try to identify, and provide, key support that other agencies have tended to ignore. Broad examples, which are worthy of more thought and attention, include interventions aimed at strengthening institutional analysis and local analytical and planning capacity; interventions to strengthen directly the voices of host participants in the policy dialogue, to help secure local ownership; and interventions which focus upon the teaching and learning processes in the classroom - to help ensure that the system reforms which others are enacting do actually make a difference on the ground.

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3.92 De private organisasjonene som kanal for norsk bistand, Fase I
- 1.93 Internal learning from evaluation and reviews  
2.93 Macroeconomic impacts of import support to Tanzania  
3.93 Garantiordning for investeringer i og eksport til utviklingsland  
4.93 Capacity-Building in Development Cooperation Towards integration and recipient responsibility
- 1.94 Evaluation of World Food Programme  
2.94 Evaluation of the Norwegian Junior Expert Programme with UN Organisations
- 1.95 Technical Cooperation in Transition  
2.95 Evaluering av FN-sambandet i Norge  
3.95 NGOs as a channel in development aid  
3A.95 Rapport fra presentasjonsmøte av "Evalueringen av de frivillige organisasjoner"  
4.95 Rural Development and Local Government in Tanzania  
5.95 Integration of Environmental Concerns into Norwegian Bilateral Development Assistance: Policies and Performance
- 1.96 NORAD's Support of the Remote Area Development Programme (RADP) in Botswana  
2.96 Norwegian Development Aid Experiences. A Review of Evaluation Studies 1986-92  
3.96 The Norwegian People's Aid Mine Clearance Project in Cambodia  
4.96 Democratic Global Civil Governance Report of the 1995 Benchmark Survey of NGOs  
5.96 Evaluation of the Yearbook Human Rights in Developing Countries
- 1.97 Evaluation of Norwegian Assistance to Prevent and Control HIV/AIDS  
2.97 «Kultursjokk og korrektiv» – Evaluering av UD/NORADs studiereiser for lærere  
3.97 Evaluation of decentralisation and development  
4.97 Evaluation of Norwegian Assistance to Peace, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation in Mozambique  
5.97 Aid to Basic Education in Africa – Opportunities and Constraints



