QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION FOR ALL

Plan
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Despite the global expansion of accessible education, millions of children from poor families are denied the right to basic education. Plan seeks to ensure that children, young people and adults acquire basic learning and life skills to realise their full potential and contribute to the development of their societies.

Background

Over 100 million children of school age, most of them girls, are not enrolled in school.[i] Millions more attend schools that are so poorly funded and staffed that they will not gain the knowledge and skills needed to function as citizens, parents and workers in a changing world.

Plan's Response

Plan devotes a significant proportion of its resources every year to education, mainly primary education and Early Childhood Care and Development initiatives. Plan's interventions range from classroom construction to provision of books, from materials to support teacher training to promotion of community and child participation in the educational process. Plan has four main objectives for education:

1. To ensure the participation of pre-school children (generally under the age of six) in good quality Early Childhood Care and Development programs (ECCD)
2. To help provide children with basic learning and life skills through good quality primary schooling
3. To support children who complete primary education to continue with secondary education or other forms of post-primary education
4. To help adults, particularly women to acquire basic learning and life skills to address family, community and livelihood needs

Africa

Plan works in 20 African countries, benefiting over 4 million children. Poverty, the increasing cost of private education, high parental illiteracy, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, conflicts and wars are the main causes for the continent's poor educational situation. West Africa has the worst education indicators in the world. Primary school enrolment and completion rates are low, and the problem of food and water insecurity has a big impact of children's education, especially for girls.

Plan has introduced and supports many innovative education programs in the region. These include the Small School Program for out of school children in Egypt, satellite schools in Burkina Faso, community school management committees in Ghana and Guinea-Bissau, teacher training in Cameroon and Togo, school fee saving schemes in Cameroon, rights based approach to primary education in Kenya and Zimbabwe, and a Rapid Education program in displaced camps in Sierra Leone.

Asia

Achievement levels of children are low in poor areas where Plan works. For example, in several countries in the region, although enrolment rates are very high, dropout rages are high and girls in particular do not complete school. Furthermore, primary education is expensive and families often have to borrow money to send their children to school. The curriculum is academically oriented and often irrelevant to the needs of children in rural areas. In many countries in the region, rigid and centralised school systems allow little or no active participation of communities. Moreover, teachers are poorly trained, poorly paid and highly politicised.

Until the Education for All initiative in 1990, Plan's focus in the region was on increasing access, improving the infrastructure and supplying educational materials. Plan is now focused on tackling the issues of poor quality of learning, low community participation and limited in-house technical capacity. Plan's work includes Community Learning Assistance programs and Community Based Early Childhood Care and Development.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Plan works in 12 countries in the region, supporting educational programs such as Child Friendly Schools, My Effective School, Active Schools and Escuela Nueva, which are based on the principles of progressive education. These programs promote adequate infrastructure, contextualised curriculum, active learning methodologies, study guides, learning centres, teacher training, school governments with child participation, promotion of Child Rights, and participation by parents and the community.

The International Context

The international debt burden of poor countries results in a lack of resources to spend on primary education, in turn millions of children missing out on this most basic right. Many governments also see the provision of basic social services, including education, as a favour to the communities rather than a duty.

The 1990 World Conference on Education for All, which took place in Senegal, stated that education should be available to all children by 2015. Plan's educational goals and strategies closely parallel those agreed at the World Conference.

Summary

Plan believes that Education for All by 2015 is an ambitious but achievable goal, and one which depends on the support of governments and the international community. A commitment to allocating sufficient resources to both Education for All and poverty reduction is necessary to ensure that the basic educational needs of all children are met. Plan is committed to achieving this at the school level in the areas it works, through its School Improvement Program. The key elements of this program are:

- Making the public education system more accountable to local communities
- Involving all stakeholders and supporting networks
- Targeting girls and women
- Supporting Early Childhood Care and Development
- Promoting competency-based teaching and learning
- Supporting community initiatives to basic education
- Ensure basic education to children affected by civil wars and HIV/AIDS

Plan is a humanitarian child-centred organisation working in 45 developing countries with families and their communities to help children realise their full potential in life.

[i] UNESCO *Monitoring Report on Education for All* 2001