

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Let universal education rest; put more money in expanding pre-schooling

As the United Nations is currently debating how to allocate about \$2.5 trillion in development aid for the 2015-2030 period, education will most likely gain prominence. But do we fund early education or secondary school? Economist George Psacharopoulos says the priority should be increasing the number of preschool children in sub-Saharan Africa.

With the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expiring next year, the world is busy prioritising various highly important issues and setting goals for the next 15 years. Education has been among the objectives in the forefront, and will remain so, partially because the noble goal of achieving universal education has proved impossible to achieve so far. In 1961 Unesco set the goal of achieving 100 per cent primary enrolment by 1980 (from a then baseline of 40 per cent), and since then a set of goals has been missed and simply reformulated with a later target date.

The post-2015 proposals follow the trend by pushing targets out to 2030, while 60 million children remain out of school. Sub-Saharan Africa is where the greatest problems lie and where the most can be achieved.

While Africa made very good progress on education — the total net primary school enrollment for Africa rose from 64 per cent in 2000 to 84 per cent in 2009, according to the United Nations — it has not achieved universal primary education. In Kenya, 74.2 per cent of children attended primary school in 2003 according to the Unesco, and 81.8 per cent by 2009.

Uganda is also unlikely to achieve universal primary education by 2015, even though it was one of the first African nations to introduce a policy of providing free schooling to pri-



Pupils in group work. Children are highly receptive to knowledge when young because there is generally no cultural barrier to education of girls and young children can contribute relatively little in terms of labour. Picture: File

COMMENTARY DR BJØRN LOMBORG

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mary children. According to a 2014 Unicef study, the country has a 92 per cent net primary school enrollment rate, but a poor retention rate — only one-third of Ugandan children who enter primary school complete it. The main reason is poverty — while tuition is free, education is not "costless" (e.g. books, uniforms, opportunity cost) and families cannot afford to continue primary education.

Instead of once again pushing back the deadline of universal education, it is time for the international community to prioritise targets and focus limited resources on the most effective, says economist George Psacharopoulos, formerly of London School of Economics and the World Bank, the first in a series of papers commissioned by the Copenhagen Consensus Center looking at the post-2015 development agenda.

Abandoning the concept of universal education, money should be spent on expanding pre-schooling, in Sub-Saharan Africa, Psacharopoulos says, as it is at this age, and in this region where the greatest benefit can be achieved for every dollar spent. Pre-schooling provides children a head start in life, improves their life-long earning power and has wider societal benefits.

Using cost-benefit analysis, Psacharopoulos states that funding schooling and pre-schooling for all, will require spending more than the entire global education budget. This is clearly not sustainable. The reasons for focusing resources first on pre-school and primary education include that children are highly receptive to knowledge when young, there is generally no cultural barrier to education of girls at this stage, and young children can contribute relatively little in terms of labour. It is also cheaper to deliver early years' education.

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However, to make choices between different education targets and goals from other areas — health and nutrition, for example — estimates have to be made. While it is straightforward enough to work out the costs of education — mainly the obvious costs of providing teachers and school buildings, plus the opportunity cost of child labour — the benefits are less clear-cut.

Based on the most extensive data collected, Psacharopoulos shows that the best target is likely to be: "Increase the pre-school enrollment ratio in sub-Saharan Africa from the present 18 per cent to 59 per cent," which has a benefit-cost ratio of 33.5. This means that for every dollar spent on pre-school, SSA will get \$33.5 back in improved future earnings for the individual, and other social benefits.

Achieving 100 per cent primary education in sub-Saharan Africa alone shows a benefit of 7, which is much lower than the 50 per cent target for pre-school in the same region. Concentrating on the most cost-effective goal would be a better use of scarce resources.

Undoubtedly, quality of education is also important, but hard to achieve. Extra expenditure on factors like reduced class sizes alone make surprisingly little impact, but investment in institutional changes such as exams and teacher accountability could have a higher impact.

If the world's poorest are to be helped the most, tough choices have to be made between competing goals. In an ideal world, universal, high quality secondary education would be an excellent goal, but first the urgent problem of basic level education in the world's most deprived regions has to be addressed. This way, we have the best hope of doing the most good with limited resources over the next 15 years.

Dr Bjorn Lomborg, an adjunct professor at the Copenhagen Business School, directs the Copenhagen Consensus Centre

Human-wildlife conflict reduces number of lions in Tanzania

By ADAM IHUCHA
Special Correspondent

THERE HAS BEEN a huge decline in the number of lions in wildlife-rich-Tanzania in the past decade, thanks to retaliatory killings.

A recent survey shows that Tarangire-Manyara ecosystem, the country's key lion's refuge, has been losing an average of 25 lions annually during the period under review.

Findings by the Tarangire Lion Project show a total of 226 lions have been killed between 2004-

2013 in retaliation by neighbouring communities for the killing of livestock. Dr Bernard Kissui, a leading lion researcher warned that the entire big cat population could disappear and hurt the \$1.9 billion tourism industry if affirmative action is not taken.

"Retaliatory killing of lions is silent, but a real threat to the lion population in the Tarangire-Manyara ecosystem where incidences of spearing and poisoning of lions by livestock keepers has been recorded," Dr Kissui says.

The worst mass killing was in

2009 when a pride preyed on villagers' cows, and over 26 lions were slaughtered by angry villagers, near Tarangire National Park in western Arusha, shaking Tanzania's reputation as one of the remaining lion strongholds in the world.

Official estimates show that there are between 15,000 and 16,000 li-

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Number of lions Tarangire-Manyara ecosystem lost annually, according to a recent survey

ons in national parks and game reserves with a smaller population in unprotected areas.

This is the largest population in Africa and about 40 per cent of the total population of remaining lions in the world. Tanzania Association of Tour Operators council member, Peter Lindstrom, suggests the state should protect migration corridors and wildlife dispersal areas outside protected areas.

He said that the state should reform policies to devolve management and benefits from wildlife.

"We need to encourage commu-

nity based tourism and investment in areas outside game parks and protected areas by allowing communities to be amply rewarded for protecting lions and other wildlife through tangible and realistic financial rewards for doing so" Mr Lindstrom noted.

Records show that the entire Tarangire-Manyara ecosystem faces a massive decline in wildlife populations due to an increase in human population coupled with an ever increasing demand for land uses not compatible with conservation interests.