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Basic Education and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

Editorial

The importance of basic education for development is widely acknowledged for a long time. Basic education constitutes one of the most important means by which the poorest society can improve their situation and guarantee a life of dignity for their citizens. Studies on poverty and development show that basic education should be an essential component of any development strategy that aims at people's development. This realisation is reflected in educational agenda of many countries. We find that even before the Jomtien Conference in 1990 on Education For All (EFA), universal primary education has had been on the agenda of many countries of the world, including several developing countries. It has also been an important subject listed in the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which was approved by almost all countries of the world. However, the progress has not been even across several countries during the last several decades. While some developing countries have made rapid progress and today are in the forefront with respect to primary education and achievement of other EFA goals, with nearly one hundred percent enrolment ratios, high completion rates, gender parity, etc., there are several countries which lag far behind. Among the world regions, the Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia belong to the later category.

Among the several goals of EFA, universal primary education has been the most important one. Universal primary education means universal enrolment, i.e., (a) enrolment of all children of the relevant age-group (mostly defined around 6-11) in primary schools, (b) universal retention, i.e., continuation in the primary schools and completion of at least five years of schooling by all children, and (c) universal attainment, i.e., attainment of at least a minimum levels of skills with respect to the three r's – reading, writing, and arithmetic, by the time children complete primary education. Accordingly public policies on universal primary education concentrated on both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of primary education, though the focus has been relatively more on the quantitative aspects of providing schooling facilities and increasing the enrolments.

Sub-Saharan Africa also had a long history of universal primary education. It was pledged in the All Africa States Conference in 1961 that free, universal and compulsory primary education would be attained by 1980 (Eshiwani 1993, pp.132-33). But the progress made during the last several decades has been somewhat tardy in several countries of the Sub-Saharan African region. It gained some kind of a momentum after the Jomtien Conference (1990) and later the Dakar Conference (2000). As the UNESCO (2009, p.41) noted, "Sub-Saharan Africa has made particularly impressive strides, with many governments increasing the priority attached to basic education." However, still many countries are far away from the goals. As many as 35.2 million children of the relevant age-group in Sub-Saharan Africa, who should be in the school, are actually

outside the schools in 2006[1]. This constitutes as high as 47 per cent of the world's out-of-school children. It has been reported that Nigeria, the largest country in the region and one of the nine largest countries in the world in terms of population, also one of the E-9 countries a group made in the context of EFA, has the largest number of out-of-school children in the world and that this distinction that Nigeria has, would continue even in 2015. In fact, according to the projections, the number of out-of-school children is likely to decline very marginally from 8.1 million in 2004-07 to 7.6 million by 2015. This, namely the phenomenon of large numbers of out of school children, "represents", as the UNESCO (2009, p.60) notes, "a crucial human development challenge… and an indictment of national and international policy failures." In 2004 it was estimated, based on the statistics available in the *Global Education Digest 2004*, that 30 per cent of the children in seven countries in the region, viz., Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Mali and Niger, never started schooling let alone attended regularly (Tomasevski 2006).

With a large size of out-of-school children, the enrolment ratios cannot be impressive. Though the gross enrolment ratio in primary education in the region has increased from 72 per cent in 1991 to 95 per cent in 2006, it does not mean that 95 per cent of the children of the relevant age group are enrolled in primary schools in 2006. After all, this is a *gross* enrolment ratio, unadjusted for over and under aged children. The *net* enrolment ratio, i.e., adjusted for over and under aged pupils in primary education is estimated to be only 70 per cent in 2006; however, the same improved from 54 per cent in 1991. During the 1990s it appears that enrolments in primary schools in the region declined by 10 per cent (Colclough & Al-Samarrai 1998, p.3). It may be noted that the current level of 70 per cent net enrolment ratio is the lowest among the world regions (Table 1).

Table 1. Gross and Net Enrolment Ratios in Primary Education (%)

	Gross			*Net*		
	1991	*2001*	*2006*	*1991*	*2001*	*2006*
World	98	101	105	81	84	86
Developed Countries	102	101	101	96	96	95
Developing Countries	97	101	106	78	83	85
Sub-Saharan Africa	*72*	*85*	*95*	*54*	*63*	*70*

Source: *EFA Global Monitoring Report* (several years)

While these are regional averages, differences between several countries within the region are very wide, as the figures in Table 2 suggest. The net enrolment ratio in primary education, for example, varies between 39 per cent in Liberia and 99 per cent in Seychelles.

[1] Most of the statistics used here are drawn, unless otherwise mentioned, from UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Reports.

Table 2. Low and High Performers in Net Enrolment Ratio in Primary Education, 2006

Bottom *(<50%)*	***Top*** *(>90%)*
Liberia (39%)	Seychelles (99%)
Niger (43%)	Tanzania (98%)
Central African Republic (46%)	Sao Tome & Principe (98%)
Burkina Faso (47%)	Madagascar (96%)
Eritrea (47%)	Mauritius (95%)
	Zambia (92%)

Note: Figures in ( ) are net enrolment ratios.
Source: *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009*

The problem is tougher than what the enrolment ratios indicate, as a large number of children drop out before completing grade V. It is estimated that as high as 32 per cent of the children in Sub-Saharan Africa who enrol in grade I dropout before the completion of the primary cycle of five years of education. In other words, only 68 per cent of the children enrolled in Grade I survive up to Grade V. Added to this is the problem of repetition. In every grade, on average, 12 per cent of the children repeat the grade, as they either fail in the year-end examination, or are not able to complete the given grade otherwise, satisfactorily. Hardly 31 per cent of the children in Rwanda survive to the last grade in primary education. The primary school cohort completion rate is as low as 13 per cent in Rwanda. If one considers repetition and dropout factors, and examines the primary school progression rates, hardly ten per cent of the children are found to progress to grade V without dropping out and/or repeating any grade in counties like Madagascar, Mali and Malawi. For many children in the region, primary education seems to be the first and also the last or the terminal level of education!

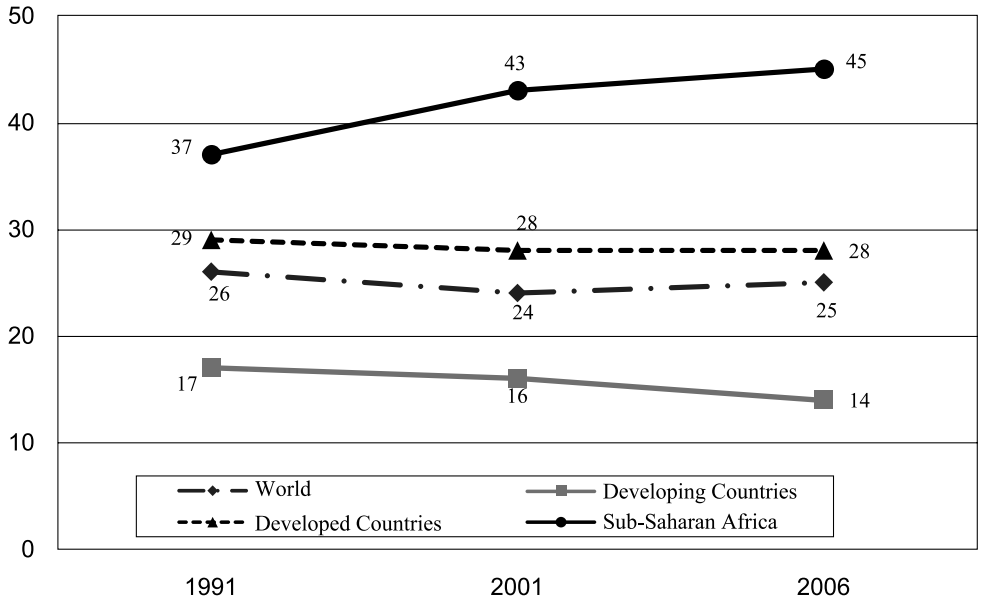
Rates of participation in education by gender and by economic levels of living of the people are marked: girls are at a disadvantage; and the economically poorest sections of the society constitute the most deprived sections in case of education too. Only ten percent of the poorest income quintile in Guinea and 15 per cent in Niger and Chad go to schools, while 98 per cent in Chad and 77 per cent in Niger belonging to the top income quintile participate in schooling (World Bank 2008, p.92).

All these disturbing features of primary education get reflected in secondary and higher education. The transition rate from primary to secondary education is only 62 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa, compared to 99 per cent in developed countries and 88 per cent in developing countries on the whole, on average.

Several studies (e.g., Tilak 2002a, b) have shown that there are three sets of factors that explain why children do not go to school, and if they are enrolled why do they dropout, or discontinue schooling. They are: (a) poverty and other economic reasons, (b) school related factors and (c) other reasons. It is widely noted that poverty is one of the most important factors that hinders the participation of children in schooling. Added

to this, is the cost of schooling – direct and opportunity costs. All this is evident from the high incidence of child labour in many developing countries. An equally important set of factors relates to the schooling systems – availability and physical accessibility of schools, the infrastructure facilities available in schools for effective learning, the number and quality of teachers working in the schools, and the overall school ambiance. These school related factors are important to get children enrolled in schools, to retain them in schools until they complete the given cycle of schooling and to attain satisfactory levels of learning.

While household poverty is a larger issue, school related factors including costs of schooling are an important issue that educational planners and policy makers can and should address. One of the simplest measures to improve quality could be provision of sufficient number of teachers -- sufficient number of qualified and trained teachers. After all, we find a very systematic relationship between pupil-teacher ratio and primary school completion rates. *Ceteris pari bus*, countries with a pupil teacher ratio around 20-25 have completion rates of above 90 per cent; and countries with pupil teacher ratios above 70 have completion rates below 20 per cent. Unfortunately, the pupil-teacher ratio is the highest in sub-Saharan Africa, on average it is 45, while the world average is 25 pupils per every teacher, 28 in developing counties and as low as 14 in the group of developed counties in 2006 (Figure 1).



Source: *EFA Global Monitoring Reports* (several years)

Figure 1. Pupil-Teacher Ratio in Primary Education

These figures are regional averages. Even national averages do not reveal the real picture, as variations between several schools within each country could be very large. Some of the primary schools in Sub-Saharan Africa have a pupil teacher ratio above 100. More over, while the ratio is improving, i.e., number of pupils per teacher falling over the years in other regions of the world, it is rapidly increasing in Sub-Saharan Africa, posing serious problems of quality and internal efficiency – participation and completion rates.

That there is a severe shortage of teachers in primary schools is well recognised. It is estimated that the region requires an additional 1.6 million teachers by 2015, while presently there are 2.6 million teachers. Further, lack of trained and qualified teachers poses a serious problem in many countries of the region. Though on average, 86 per cent of the teachers in the region are trained, only 27 per cent of the teachers in Chad and 36-37 per cent in Madagascar and Togo are trained teachers. The rest are untrained. This does have a very serious negative impact on the quality of education and even on enrolment ratios, completion rates and on the levels of learning. It is also important to examine the duration, quality and type of training, which vary widely between several countries.

One of the important policy measures that is being adopted in this context in many countries in the recent years is recruitment of female teachers, as number of female teachers is being found to be positively related to enrolments in general and enrolments of girls in particular and their continuation in schools. As a result of this policy, today more than 60 per cent of the primary school teachers in the world are women. But the corresponding ratio is only 45 in Sub-Saharan Africa, though it marks a small improvement in the recent years (Table 3).

Table 3. Percentage of Female Teachers in Primary Education

(Weighted Averages)

	1991	*2001*	*2006*
World	56	73	62
Developed Countries	78	83	83
Developing Countries	49	61	57
Sub-Saharan Africa	*40*	*38*	*45*

Source: *EFA Global Monitoring Report*s (several years)

While poverty, the other important factor that constraints participation of children in schooling is a larger issue as already stated, the educational policy makers can as well address it too, to some extent, by providing free education -- abolition of all types of fees in schools, free provision of textbooks, stationery and other learning material, uniforms, school meals etc., to all children. We have already experienced that in some of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, when school fees are abolished, enrolments in primary education jumped by several times. Further, UNESCO (2009) recognises that offering school meals and cash incentives can tilt the balance between school and work in favour of enrolments in schools. This would also reduce the harmful effects of uneven income

distribution.

But unfortunately in many countries of the region, primary education is not provided free. In as many as 21 of 46 countries in the region, there is no legal framework to guarantee free education (Tomasevski 2006) (Table 4).

Table 4. Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa where Legal Guarantee of Free Education Exists/Doest not Exist

Exists	*Does not Exist*
Chad	Angola
Congo	Benin
Democratic Republic of Congo	Botswana
Equatorial Guinea	Burkina Faso
Gabon	Burundi
Gambia	Cameroon
Ghana	Cape Verde
Guinea-Bissau	Central African Republic
Madagascar	Comoros
Mali	Côte d'Ivoire
Mauritius	Eritrea
Namibia	Ethiopia
Niger	Guinea
Nigeria	Kenya
Rwanda	Lesotho
Sao Tome & Principe	Liberia
Senegal	Malawi
Seychelles	Mozambique
Swaziland	Sierra Leone
	Somalia
	South Africa
	Togo
	Uganda
	Tanzania
	Zambia
	Zimbabwe

Source: *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009* ; and.
Tomasevski (2006)

In fact, only three countries, viz., Mauritius, where primary education has been free since 1977, Sao Tome & Principe and Seychelles, actually guarantee free primary education. It does not necessarily mean that where legal guarantees exist in other countries, primary education is provided free. Khattan and Burnet (2004) found that in 97 per cent of the 79 countries surveyed, fees and other charges were levied even when there were laws

prohibiting the same. The fees were "unconstitutional" and "technically illegal." More recent evidence shows that in as many as 22 counties in the region fees are levied in public primary schools, though some countries plan not to continue with this practice and an increasing number of governments have promised in the last couple of years to make education free. In the more recent years some changes have been made.

Making primary education free and compulsory requires public funds. But governments everywhere are starved of resources for education. Particularly in developing counties the allocations to education have been far from adequate. Public financing forms an important strategy to improve the education situation. In fact, the priority accorded to education by a government, can be noted in the percentage of national income devoted to education from public exchequer. Sub-Saharan Africa allocated 4.4 per cent of the gross national production (GNP) to education, compared to 5.3 per cent in the developed countries and the world average of 4.9 per cent in 2005. Sub-Saharan Africa also fares poorly in terms of public expenditure on primary education. Expenditure on primary education per pupil as per cent of GNP per capita was 13 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2006, compared to 17 per cent in the developed countries and 14 per cent in the world on average. More clearly, Sub-Saharan Africa spends only US$ 167 (PPP$ in 2005 prices) per pupil in primary education, while the world average is six times higher, and the developed countries, on average, spend 30 times higher (Figure 2). Misplaced priorities, military needs and fiscal constraints do not allow many countries to make adequate allocations to basic education.

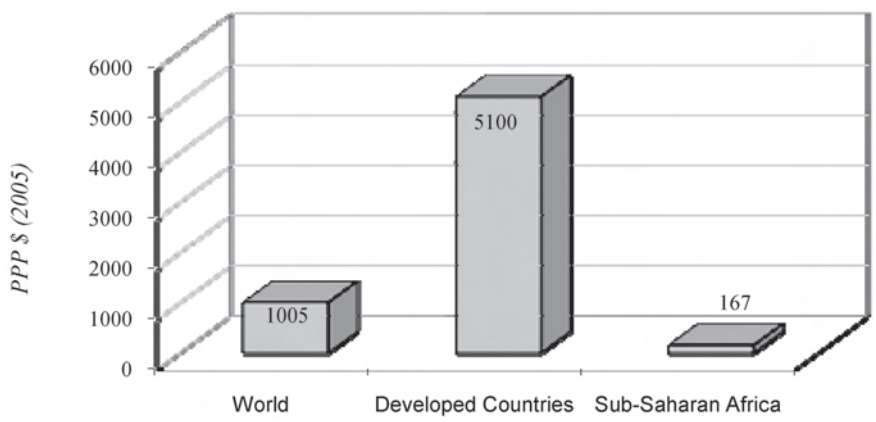


Figure 2. Public Expenditure on Primary Education per Pupil

To sum up, unfortunately the current situation, recent trends and public policies do not lead to any optimistic predictions about fulfilment of EFA goals by 2015 in Sub-Saharan Africa. Most of the countries of the region, according to the Global Monitoring Report of the UNESCO, are not likely to achieve the goals by 2015. Only 62 per cent of

the adults in the region are literate, and it is projected to increase to 72 per cent by 2015, while developing countries on average will have a rate around 85 per cent by that time. In short, many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa require huge expansion of schooling facilities and at the same time need to make equally significant efforts to improve quality of education.

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The educational problems in Sub-Saharan Africa pose a serious challenge, not only African governments, but also to the internal development community at large. The task is indeed stupendous. It requires, *inter alia*, sound and robust knowledge on various issues involved. As already noted, the regional averages, or even country level averages that I have discussed above, do not give a complete picture of the nature and magnitude of problems involved in Education For All. Some of the countries may be having some success stories which are worth-emulating by others, some negative experiences that can be avoided by others, and in general many lessons that others may learn about. Hence the need for country studies at micro level arises. Some of the micro level studies may not allow us to make generalisations. Nevertheless they provide valuable insights into the whole problem and about the needed interventions at policy and planning levels, often filling critical gaps in knowledge base and thereby supplementing the conclusions and insights received from macro level analyses.

With this in mind, it was envisaged in the project on "Africa-Asia Dialogue", launched at the Centre for the Study of International Cooperation in Education, Hiroshima University, to initiate a series of micro level investigations on a variety of issues relating to basic education in African countries. The Africa-Asia Dialogue project has certain novel features which are worth-noting. The project aimed at self-reliance in research, forging of linkages between universities and basic education, and enabling of a dialogue between African and Asian scholars on issues of common interest. The sponsors of the project were to serve only as catalysts, and the studies were to be designed and conducted by the African scholars themselves. This may be contrasted with the vast amount of research on Sub-Saharan Africa conducted by outsiders, especially the westerners. The scholars were free to choose the research issues that they would like to be engaged with. All the researchers were to be from the university community to work in close interaction with their governments on the one hand and the local communities on the other. This was to demonstrate the contribution of university community to policy issues relating to basic education. Further, conceived as a joint research endeavour by the Asian and African scholars to contribute to enhanced understanding of research and policy issues relating to education, the project was to provide a forum for a continuous dialogue between the African and Asian scholars. This was based on the assumption that African scholars have a lot to learn from Asian experience and the Asian scholars from the African experience. So the African and Asian scholars were to reflect on each others' perspectives and understanding.

Under the umbrella of the project a few countries and researchers from African countries were selected, who selected their own themes for research under the broad subject of basic education and development, which were intensively discussed in several meetings with Asian scholars. The progress was periodically reviewed. In fact, the reflective meetings also provided a platform for the African scholars to come together and share their experiences (a) among themselves and (b) with the Asian scholars and to review and revise the work.

In all, more than a dozen excellent research studies were produced. The current and the previous special issues of the *JOURNAL* provide some kind of summary versions of these research studies, which were subjected to normal process of peer review and revisions Earlier versions of some of these papers were presented in a special session of the 9th UKFIET International Conference on "Education and Development: Going for Growth -- School, Community, Economy and Nation," held at the University of Oxford in September 2007, which l coordinated and chaired jointly with Professor Nobuhide Sawamura. The previous issue, guest-edited by Professor N'Dri T. Assie-Lumumba, covered the studies on Ghana (by Ampiah), South Africa (by Mokhele and Jita), Niger (by Goza, Kallekoye and Mounkaila), Tanzania (by Komba and Nkumbi), Uganda (Nakabugo, Opolot-Okurut, Ssebbunga, Mannai and Byamugisha), and Kenya (Sawamura and Sifuna). The present issue includes eight papers, covering Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, and Nigeria. It also includes a comparative study covering Ghana, Kenya, Malawi and Uganda. Besides the valuable conclusions the several studies produce that have immense policy significance, an important aspect that one might note in these research studies is the process of research, building of research teams, conducting of surveys, sharing of work, dissemination of results, etc. Some studies are action research studies, providing valuable insights into the problem, and valuable information into the processes adopted.

It is not just Education For All, but it is Quality for Education For All which has been the recent dictum in many developing countries. Most of the studies in the two special issues of the JOURNAL focus on quality related aspects of basic education and the problems involved in providing quality education to all. I am confident that sharing of the results of the project presented in this and the preceding issues of the JOURNAL will immensely benefit the educational community at large.

In Zambia, there are three types of schools: government schools, private/church-based schools and community schools. Community schools were set up so that children do not have to travel long distances to reach a school. Dickson Nkosha and Peggy Mwanza in a detailed study examine the quality of education provided in government (regular) and community schools in the Northern Province of Zambia. The indicators identified for quality of education include relevance of the curriculum, number of trained and qualified teachers, appropriateness of teaching-learning material, mechanisms of monitoring and assessment, learning environment, sanitation facilities, etc. Based on a field study of 12 schools in rural areas in the province, Nkohsa and Mwanza find that regular schools offer

better quality education than community schools, though many seem to feel that neither regular nor community schools provide good quality education; both are in bad shape.

"Does school matter?" James Coleman et al (1962) asked this question long ago. The voluminous literature that followed over the years, in all, lead us to conclude that "yes, school does matter; but so does the household environment." Based on tests in Mathematics, English and Chichewa, conducted on about 6,000 students in about 100 rural and urban schools in the South Western Division in Malawi, Demis Kunje, Eliazbeth Salemani-Meke and Keiichi Ogawa attempt at answering a similar question: how do school and student characteristic features interact and influence pupil achievement in Malawi. The study concludes that socioeconomic status of families exerts considerable positive influence on student achievement. It is also concluded that better teacher pupil ratios help in promoting cognitive growth of the children.

It is being widely noted that the process of learning has an important effect on the very learning itself. What is the best classroom practice that improves quality of education? "Good practices" have a lot of significance in transforming education by producing demonstration effects (see Benavente & Panchaud 2008). Pierre Kouraogo Pierre and Nobila Ouedraogo attempt to summarise based on a survey of selected schools in Burkina Faso, the characteristics of a "good" teacher and an "ideal" classroom. The interesting study reveals that an "ideal" classroom has to be offering anxiety-free atmosphere; the relation between teachers and the pupils should be warm and of mutual trust; students should be given special attention; they should be listened and they should be encouraged to take initiatives. The teacher has to essentially love teaching and should have passion for the subject.

It is generally felt that students learn one third from home, one-third from teachers in the classrooms, and another one-third from peer groups. Some argue that learning from the peer groups indeed constitutes the single largest quantum of learning. In a qualitative study on eight primary schools in three major regions of Ethiopia, viz., Addis Ababa, Amhara and Oromia, and based on interactions with professionals from education departments, international organisations like the UNESCO, UNICEF and non-government organisations, Daniel Desta, Desalegn Chalchisa, Yeshitila Mulat and Adane Tesera present an interesting action research study on how peer-assessment and self-reflection contribute to enhancement of learning among the children. Peer-learning was indeed found to be helping in rapid active learning.

In the study on Madagascar, Judith Razafimbelo, Lina Rajonhson, Harinosy Ratompomalala and Jean de la croix Malazamanana attempt to explain why teachers are not able to complete the curriculum in the given time, i.e., during the academic year. This is an important issue, often overlooked. Teacher absenteeism is one of the important problems in primary education in many developing countries. Teacher absenteeism along with pupil absenteeism creates hurdles in effectively transacting the curriculum in the given time. The micro level study unravels the reasons for the absenteeism of teachers and students. It has been found that in many cases both teachers and students were to travel

long distances from their homes to schools. Besides, the climatic conditions are not always favourable for travel and also to conduct the schooling activities. These results highlight the need to provide schools at an easy walking distance of children, to provide residences to teachers, and also to provide other facilities such as transport for the teachers to go to towns on administrative work. These findings also stress the need to improve health and other infrastructure facitlies in remote areas to improve the effectiveness of schools.

As already stated, provision of sufficient number of teachers -- sufficient number of trained teachers is very important for quality education and that many countries in the region have serious constraints on this regard. Oyenike Adeosun, Susan Onuoha and Mohammed Yakassai examine quality of teacher education programmes in Nigeria. Selecting two colleges of education and randomly selecting officials from various levels for interviews for this purpose, they examine the adequacy and relevance of curriculum of the primary education studies in the Nigeria Certificate course in Education in the colleges. It has been found that while the curriculum is adequate and relevant, the teaching strategies need a lot of improvement. Also the teacher trainers need to be given a good understanding of the concept of basic education.

The problem of HIV/AIDS reached alarming magnitudes in some of the countries in the region. The Kenya study by Sara Ruto, Fatuma Chege and Violet Wawire is concerned with HIV/AIDS education. HIV and AIDS have actually orphaned many children and these vulnerable children require special attention. Besides, all people need to be well-educated about it. For imparting effective HIV/AIDS education, capacity development programmes for teachers and school administrators need to be improved. Ruto and her colleagues also critically review the national policy on HIV/AIDS education in Kenya.

The last paper in the special issue provides a comparative analysis of the policy of universal primary education in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi and Uganda. The Africa-Asia joint-collaborative team of researchers, led by Mikiko Nishimura included five scholars from Japan and five African scholars from the concerned countries. All the four countries had abolished fee in primary schools, though at various points of time: Malawi in 1994, Uganda in 1997, Kenya in 2003 and Ghana in 2005. The four different countries adopt somewhat similar policies for the expansion of primary education. Yet the outcomes are different in terms of enrolment ratios, survival rates and in terms of achievement levels of learning. Is there any meaningful explanation for this? It has been found that even if policies are similar, implementation is the one that makes the difference. Systematic, effective, quality-focused and result-oriented implementation mechanisms of the policies are critical for the success of the policies. Involvement of all the concerned groups of population in policy making and in its implementation also makes a substantial difference. The opinion surveys made on local administrators, head teachers and parents reveal that a sizeable proportion in each group feels that the policies are good, but not well implemented.

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I was honoured to be a Visiting Professor at the Centre for the Study of International Cooperation in Education, Hiroshima University in 2002-03 during which period, the Africa-Asia Dialogue project was conceived and I had the privilege of being a part of the small but vibrant group at CICE with Professors Masafumi Nagao, Norihiro Kuroda, Nobuhide Sawamura and Kazuo Kuroda that conceived, conceptualised and formulated the project proposal. Professor Nagao with his untiring efforts obtained active collaboration of the UNESCO, the United Nations University and the Japan International Cooperation Agency, among others for the project. Dr. Kazuhiro Yoshida joined the team at CICE later. I was also given the privilege to join the several discussion, review and reflective meetings with the African scholars, held at the Hiroshima University, Makerere University, Kampala, and the UNESCO, Paris, and also the study-mission cum capacity building programme held at the National Institute (now University) of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi, India, all of which gave me a valuable opportunity to learn a lot from the rich experience and expertise of the Asian and African scholars, and to reflect upon the studies.

Today, I feel additionally honoured to serve as the Guest-Editor of this special issue of the JOURNAL that consists of summary results of the second lot of studies conducted under the project and to offer this as an important contribution of the AA Dialogue Project. It is hoped that the researchers as well as practitioners of educational reforms -- policy makers, planners and managers in education in Africa and other countries of the world, including the wider international community will find it very useful in their endeavour towards fulfilling the goals relating to Education For All.

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