



# Asia-South Pacific Education Watch

## Papua New Guinea: Summary Report

### Survey of Education Experience



## About Asia South Pacific Education Watch Initiative

The critical state and ailing condition of education in many countries in Asia-South Pacific region compels serious and urgent attention from all education stakeholders.

Centuries of neglect, underinvestment in education, corruption, and inefficiency by successive governments in the countries of the region have left a grim toll in poor education performance marked by low school attendance and survival rates, high dropout and illiteracy rates, and substandard education quality.

Moreover, there are glaring disparities in access to education and learning opportunities: hundreds of millions of impoverished and disadvantaged groups which include out-of-school children and youth, child workers, children in conflict areas, women, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, dalit caste and other socially discriminated sectors, remain largely unreached and excluded by the education system.

Hence they are denied their fundamental human right to education and hindered from availing of the empowering and transformative tool of quality, life-long learning that could have equipped them to realize their full human potential, uplift their living conditions, and participate meaningfully in governance and in decisions that affect their lives.

### At Midway: Failing Grade in EFA

In the year 2000, governments and the international community affirmed their commitment to quality Education for All (EFA) and Millenium Develoment Goals (MDGs). Midway to target year 2015, government assessments of EFA progress reveal that education gaps and disparities persist, and education conditions may even be worsening as indicated by shortfalls and reversals in EFA achievement.

The landmark year 2007 therefore presents a timely opportunity for civil society networks to engage governments in addressing the unmet EFA goals and MDG education targets, especially for disadvantaged groups.

### Real World Strategies

Spurred by the challenge of pushing for accelerated progress towards EFA, the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) and the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) launched the Real World Strategies (RWS) programme to undertake realistic and practical initiatives based on the actual conditions, experiences, and aspirations of people in communities.

*(Continued on inside back cover)*

Papua New Guinea: Summary Report

**Survey of Education Experience**



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**Papua New Guinea: Summary Report  
Survey of Education Experience**

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The **Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education** (ASPBAE) is a regional association of organisations and individuals working towards promoting quality education for all and transformative and liberating, life-long adult education and learning. It strives to forge and sustain an Asia-Pacific movement dedicated to mobilizing and supporting community and people's organizations, national education coalitions, teachers unions, campaign networks, and other civil society groups and institutions in holding governments and the international donor community accountable in meeting education targets and commitments, ensuring the right of all to education, and upholding education as an empowering tool for combating poverty and all forms of exclusion and discrimination, pursuing sustainable development, enabling active and meaningful participation in governance, and building a culture of peace and international understanding.

ASPBAE publications form an integral part of ASPBAE's information, education, and advocacy activities and efforts, and seek to support sharing and learning among education stakeholders, advocates, practitioners, analysts, and policy-makers. The reader is therefore encouraged to use the material contained herein for reproduction, adaptation, and translation worldwide for use in nonprofit education and information activities and publications, with due acknowledgement to ASPBAE, and to provide feedback that could help in further improving these publications.

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# Papua New Guinea: Summary Report

## Survey of Education Experience

Papua New Guinea is home to peoples with diverse cultures and languages. The country's extremely rugged terrain and lack of infrastructure make access to education more difficult for its population. However, the real constraints to progress on education are problems of governance such as low functioning capacity of the government, its limited reach to its citizens, and poor allocation of available resources.

This report highlights crises in three aspects of the educational system—a crisis in school participation, a crisis in school quality, and a crisis in literacy. In fact, older generations are more literate than the younger.

Bold and decisive action is needed to address the crises. The government must act to lower expensive fees and other costs that keep students away, to bring schools closer to communities and to create an environment conducive to learning.

### A. Education Watch and Survey of Educational Experience

Education Watch in Papua New Guinea is a project of the PNG Education Advocacy Network (PEAN) in collaboration with Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE). PEAN is a network of civil society organizations committed to achieving the goals of Education for All (EFA). A key element of this program is the Survey of Educational Experience developed by ASPBAE and PEAN in collaboration with the Coalition on Education Solomon Islands (COESI).

The lack of reliable data on educational attainment prompted PEAN to conduct research on educational achievement and literacy levels, particularly among out-of-school youth and adults, to develop reliable information on which to base education policy and program development, and civil society involvement in it. The information

gathered also offers a clearer measurement of government performance in providing education for its citizens.

The survey was designed to collect accurate and statistically significant information about educational, language, and literacy experience at the village and individual levels in selected communities in two areas—an urban and a rural setting—in PNG. It examined a random sample of communities in National Capital District (NCD) and New Ireland provinces from November 2006 to March 2007. The survey interviewed 3,329 people between the ages of 15 and 60 years.

This report summarises the survey's main findings. Although the survey focused on two provinces, clear implications can be drawn for the whole of the PNG. A full version of the report is available upon request from ASPBAE and PEAN.

Future surveys could cover other provinces and be done on a regular basis to enable trends to be tracked over time. There is potential also for this survey to be adapted to examine a wide range of educational issues in greater detail.

## B. Commitments and Progress on EFA

The Papua New Guinea government acknowledged its commitment to the goals of Education for All when it drew up in 2004 a 10-year National Plan for Education. Yet in the same plan, the government qualified its endorsement of the EFA Goals by stating:

“In the current economic climate it is difficult to see how the second of the EFA Goals [free universal primary education] can be realized within the timeframe. However, every effort is being made to give children the opportunity to achieve a primary education. The Plan aims to achieve the fifth of the EFA Goals [eliminate gender disparities and achieve gender equality] within the timeframe of the Plan as opposed to that stipulated.”

The 2006 EFA Global Monitoring Report noted that PNG is making little progress towards achieving the EFA Goals. Indeed, **PNG is at risk of not achieving the goals.**

The Global Monitoring Report uses the EFA Development Index





*Mock interview during  
surveyors' training in  
New Ireland Province*

to measure the performance of countries in relation to four of the six EFA Goals. The four goals included in the EFA Development Index are universal primary education (Goal 2), adult literacy (Goal 4), gender parity and equality (Goal 5) and quality of education (Goal 6). Of the 128 countries for which a Development Index was calculated, 46 have achieved or are close to achieving the EFA Goals; 49 are making progress towards achievement; and 28 countries, including PNG, are at risk of not achieving those goals.

The Global Monitoring Report also identifies PNG as one of only four countries to record a sharp decrease in its Development Index between 1998 and 2002. PNG's Development Index fell 8.2%, surpassed only by Chad with an 11.3% reduction.

In relation to particular EFA Goals, the Global Monitoring Report found that:

- PNG stands out as one of three countries, along with Azerbaijan and Saudi Arabia, at "serious risk" of not achieving universal primary education by 2015;
- PNG is one of 30 countries at "serious risk" of not achieving the adult literacy target by 2015 because "very low literacy rates are not increasing fast enough;" and
- PNG is one of 24 countries at risk of not achieving the gender parity goal at either primary or secondary school by the year 2015.

The Global Monitoring Report concludes that for countries like PNG, “achieving EFA will require intervention throughout the school system” and “a redoubling of efforts in key policy areas” including:

- Planning and financing for EFA;
- Teacher supply and quality;
- Reaching the disadvantaged sectors—out-of-school youth and adults, the poor, ethnic and linguistic minorities, the disabled, and the sick;
- Adapting to conflict, natural disaster, and economic instability;
- Establishing safe and healthy schools; and
- Harnessing higher levels of better targeted, better coordinated, and more predictable international assistance.

### C. Key Messages from the Survey

Papua New Guinea faces:

- **A Crisis in School Participation**, as shown by alarmingly low participation rates for youth aged 15 to 19 years. Too many young people are missing out on school;
- **A Crisis in School Quality**, as seen in low literacy rates for those who have completed school; and
- **A Crisis in Literacy**, as illustrated by low literacy rates in the community, dramatically lower than officially reported rates.

ASPBAE and PEAN urge the PNG Government and its international development partners to accept these challenges and develop a bold and imaginative response that will lead to clear and greater progress towards achievement of the EFA Goals.

#### I. The Crisis in School Participation: Youth Are Missing Out

One of the most disturbing findings is that almost half or 49% of 15 to 19 year olds are not attending school. The participation rates, or more accurately non-participation rates, for boys and girls are roughly equal, but the provincial variations are striking.

While it is worrying enough that 44% of young people of school age in NCD are not in school, it is even more alarming that 71% of respondents 15 to 19 years old in New Ireland Province are missing out on education (See Table 1).

AT SCHOOL NOW? 15-19 YEARS		
	Yes	No
<b>National Capital District</b>	293	235
%	55.5	44.5
<b>New Ireland</b>	30	74
%	28.8	71.2
<b>Male</b>	154	147
%	51.2	48.8
<b>Female</b>	169	162
%	51.1	48.9
<b>Total</b>	323	309
%	51.1	48.9

*Table 1. Number and percentage of students aged 15 to 19 who are in and out of school in NCD and New Ireland provinces*

Primary school participation rates have also declined dramatically in recent years. Older age groups reported higher completion rates than can be expected for those aged 15 to 19, given their current low participation rates. (See Table 2)

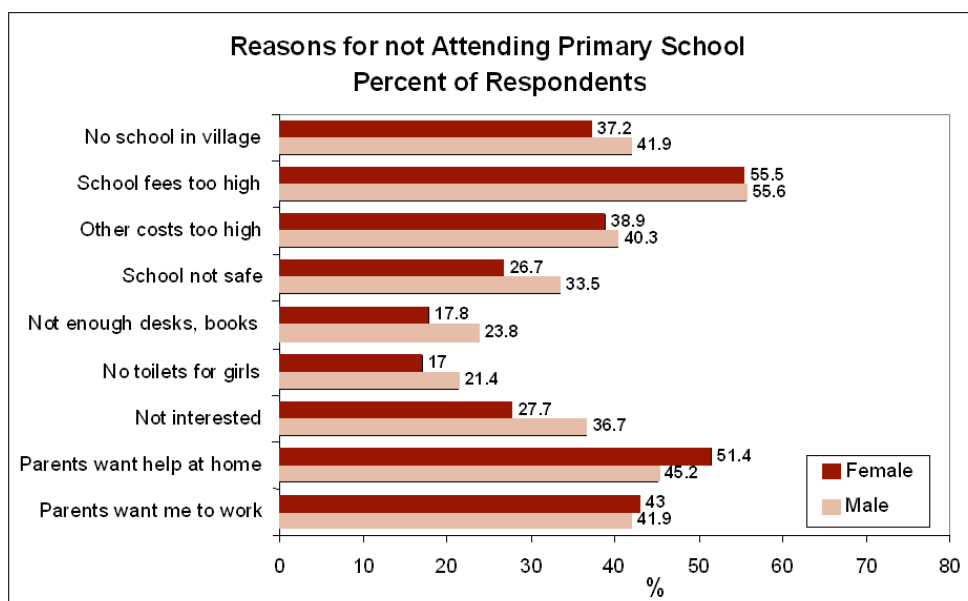
Complete Primary School, 15-60 years			
	Yes	No	Never Attended
<b>15-19 years</b>	186	97	30
% within age group	59.4	31.0	9.6
<b>20-24 years</b>	470	75	14
% within age group	84.1	13.4	2.5
<b>25-29 years</b>	363	75	23
% within age group	78.7	16.3	5.0
<b>30-39 years</b>	591	128	26
% within age group	79.3	17.2	3.5
<b>40-49 years</b>	370	92	39
% within age group	73.9	18.4	7.8
<b>50-60 years</b>	191	82	37
% within age group	61.6	26.5	11.9

*Table 2. Number and percentage of the population from various age groups in NCD and New Ireland provinces who completed primary school*

There is clearly a **crisis in youth participation in schools** in PNG. Low levels of school participation will mean low levels of educational attainment and fewer life opportunities for these youth. Urgent action is required to reverse the decline in primary school participation, so that the next age group of young people do not join the ranks of those who are missing out. Action must also be taken to provide meaningful second-chance learning opportunities for young people who have been denied a full basic education.

## Reasons for Missing Out

Figure 1 below shows the reasons students are not attending primary school.



The main barriers to school participation identified in the survey include, in order of frequency of response:

1. The high cost of school fees
2. Parents wanting children to help at home or to work
3. Other costs associated with school ing
4. The school is too far away
5. Not interested

*Figure 1. Reasons cited by respondents in NCD and New Ireland provinces for not attending primary school*

More girls (51.4%) than boys (45.2%) mentioned pressure from parents for them to stay and help at home. Those wishing to continue on to secondary education face many of the same barriers, especially school fees and other costs. Unless decisive steps are taken to improve access to basic education, PNG will bear a high price in terms of the social, economic, and human cost into the future.

## 2 A Crisis in School Quality

Not only is there much concern for those who are missing out on school, but there is also cause for concern for those who do attend school. Sending a child to school is no guarantee he or she will





*Pre-school children in a village community in NCD advocating their rights to education*

become literate. Not surprisingly, the survey data confirmed that almost all those who were assessed as literate had completed primary school. However, the data also showed only 19% of those who completed primary school are literate and only 23% of those who completed secondary school are literate.

These are extremely disappointing findings. It means that out of five children who complete primary school, only one is literate, and only one in four who complete secondary school is literate.

These findings point to **a crisis of quality of education in schools**. Unless the quality of education is addressed urgently and vigorously, the crisis will only deepen as each new age group suffers the same fate. Participation rates can hardly be expected to improve unless good quality education is provided. This includes an education that is culturally appropriate and contextually relevant, taught by competently trained and adequately remunerated teachers in schools that are sufficiently equipped with the proper books and equipment.

### 3. A Crisis in Adult and Youth Literacy

The overwhelming majority of survey respondents believe that being able to read, write and count is an important everyday life skill, and 95% of respondents agree that it is very important for all children to go to school. Despite such perceptions, literacy rates are disturbingly low.



The PNG government has claimed that 56% of the adult population is literate. This figure is based on a question in the 2000 National Population Census asking participants what languages they could read and write with understanding: English, Pidgin, Motu, or Tokples. They were required to provide a yes or no answer for each language.

This is a flawed method for determining literacy. It is a proxy indicator, relying on self-declaration rather than independent assessment. By comparison, apart from noting people's self-perception of the levels of reading and writing in both Tokples and in the official languages, the survey also tested each respondent's literacy skills with an independent surveyor. This presents a much more complete understanding of literacy levels in NCD and New Ireland Province.

The survey found that respondents had an inflated opinion of their ability to read their preferred official language. Seventy-four percent said they could read their preferred official language easily and only 12% say they could not read it at all. However, the test of literacy skills indicates a dramatically lower actual literacy rate.

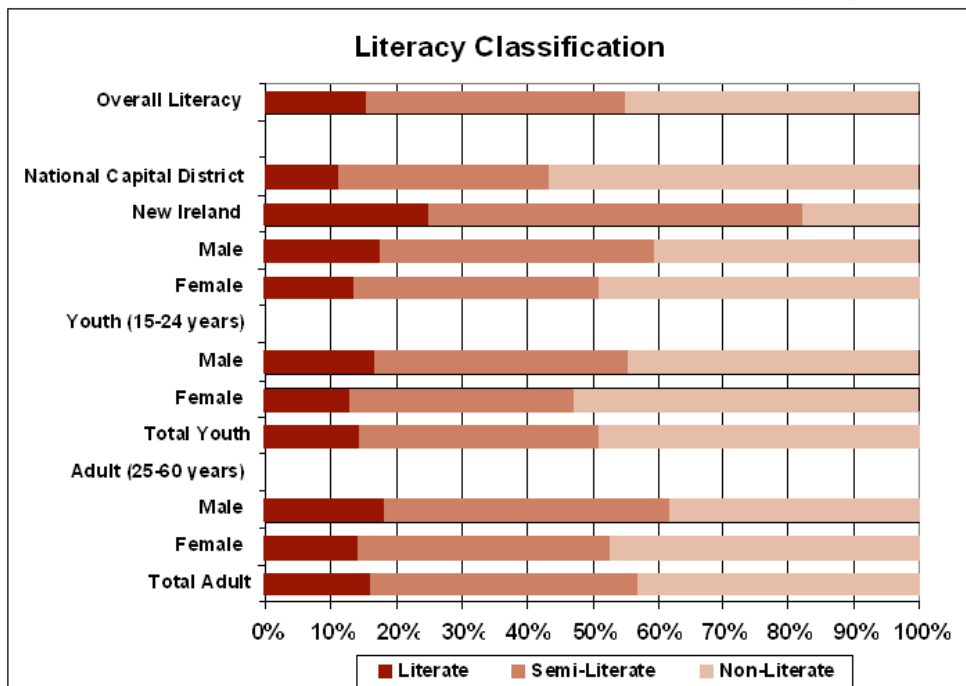
An assessment of the component skills of literacy based on the survey shows that **just 15.6% of respondents are literate**, 39.4% are semi-literate and 45.1% are non-literate. (See Figure 2)

**Our working definition of literacy** is the possession of reading, writing, and numeracy skills in an official national language and the ability to use such skills in familiar contexts in everyday life. Respondents were categorised according to the following criteria:

- **Non-literate** means being unable to read or write simple words, count objects, or use these skills in everyday life.
- **Semi-literate** means being able to read simple words and sentences, write an understandable simple sentence or two with mostly accurate spelling, count objects and perform basic calculations, and use these skills in a very limited way in everyday life.
- **Literate** means being able to read and comprehend text with ease, write complete simple sentences with correct spelling, count objects, perform calculations, and use these skills in everyday life.

### Literacy Assessment Methodology

It should be emphasised at this point that the test to determine literacy was not set at a difficult level, as seen by the sample



questions below. Only those respondents who declared that they could read an official language participated in the literacy assessment. The assessment focused on each component skill of literacy: reading, writing, numeracy, and the ability to apply these skills in familiar contexts in everyday life.

*Figure 2. Percentage of the population classified into literate, semi-literate and non-literate in the provinces of NCD and New Ireland*

The assessment tool contained a graduated series of questions in each skill area:

- Reading skills were tested by asking respondents to match three pictures with three corresponding names, to read two sentences aloud, and to read a simple story of six sentences and give oral answers to two written questions.
- Writing skills were tested by asking respondents to write the names corresponding to two pictures and to write two short sentences about the pictures.
- Numeracy skills were tested by asking respondents to count the number of objects in a picture, to name the missing number in a sequence, and to make two simple calculations in everyday scenarios.
- Application of skills was tested by asking respondents to read the time on a clock face, to interpret dates on a calendar, and to describe the message on a poster.

Each response was scored depending on the accuracy of the answer given. A composite score based on the assessment results in each skill area was calculated and used as the basis for classifying the survey population as either non-literate, semi-literate, or literate. Figures 3 and 4 are examples of questions that tested reading skill and numeracy skill.

**Can you match the pictures and words?**  
 Makim lain igo long piksa na nem bilong samting i stap long piksa?  
**Piksa bona revareva oi hahegeregere?**  
 [show participant this page and ask him/her to draw a line matching the correct words and pictures]




	Eye Ai Mata
	Bird Pisin Manu
	Fish Pis Gwarume

Figure 3. Sample questions to test a respondent's reading skill

*PNG is in the midst of a literacy crisis.*

**Can you name the missing number in this sequence?**  
 Luluk long ol namba tambolo na tokaut long dispela namba ino stap?  
**Henunai be edena numera idia torea lasi??**  
 [show participant this page and ask for oral answer]

5, 7, 9, 11, \_ , 15, 17

Figure 4. Sample questions to test a respondent's numeracy skill  
 (Further information about the literacy assessment tool is available from ASPBAE.)

The defining elements of this crisis are that:

- Literacy levels at all ages are low;
- The most literate segment of the population is the 30- to 39-year-old age group, with a literacy rate of 18.8%;

- The group with the highest proportion of non-literate are those 15 to 19 years old at 55.6%;
- The second worst literacy rate was noted among respondents 15 to 19 years old at 13.4%, behind only the oldest age group, the 50 to 60 years old, with a literacy rate of 11.4%;
- Youth literacy rates of 14.6% are worse than adult literacy rates at 16.2%;
- A greater proportion of non-literate are females;
- A greater proportion of those who are literate are males;
- Literacy rates in NCD are worse than those in New Ireland Province.

These results reflect poorly on those responsible for the education system in PNG over many years—the governments and the country's international development partners. The old official literacy rates are clearly inaccurate and inflated, and can no longer be used as the basis for policy-making. The findings of this survey should be seen as an urgent wake-up call for bold and decisive action.

## **D. Policy Implications**

ASPBAE and PEAN urge the PNG government and its international development partners to accept the challenges posed by this report and to take urgent action to accelerate progress towards achievement of the EFA Goals.

PNG leaders need to show political will, while international development partners must provide substantial, coordinated, and consistent support.

### **I. Commitment to Improve Access**

The government and its international development partners must take urgent action to ensure that by 2015, all children in PNG have access to free and complete primary education of good quality, as envisioned in EFA Goal 2.

### **2 Geography: No Barrier Policy**

The government should immediately adopt the policy that no child should be denied access to basic educational opportunities because of geography. All children should have convenient access to





*Survey interview in progress,  
New Ireland Province.*

free local primary schools or to free appropriate distance learning opportunities.

### 3. Second-Chance Learning

The government and its international development partners must take urgent action to ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programs, as stated in EFA Goal 3.

To this end, the government should, in collaboration with civil society organisations, develop second-chance education strategies aimed at providing learning opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults, especially girls and women, and those in remote areas. Pathways to formal education should be built into the plan.

### 4. Abolition of School Fees and Reduction of Other School Costs

The government should abolish school fees for primary school and act to minimise other school-related costs that families have to shoulder, such as school books, uniforms, and travel to school.



## 5. Improving the Quality of School Education

The government and its international development partners should take urgent action to ensure that all schools in PNG provide education that is culturally appropriate and contextually relevant, taught by competently trained and adequately remunerated teachers in schools that are sufficiently equipped with proper books and equipment.

## 6. Bold and Decisive Action on Adult and Youth Literacy

PNG is facing a literacy crisis. The government and its international development partners should acknowledge this and take bold and decisive action. This should include developing a more comprehensive national literacy policy, innovating new plans in collaboration with civil society organisations and communities, and substantial allocating new resources. Action is needed now to achieve at least a 50% increase in adult literacy by 2015.



*Survey interview in progress in New Ireland Province.*

## Maintaining Momentum towards Reform

The time has come for decisive and substantial action on the part of the PNG government and its international development partners. The problems are immense and, if not tackled now, will worsen to the detriment of the future development of PNG and its citizens.

This report presents challenges but is also a civil society contribution towards building better education policy and more effective education plans and programs. CSOs and communities are a valuable resource for government to work with, not only in policy development but also in implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

We encourage the government and international donors to take this report on board and work together to turn around the indicators that show the neglect of the education system in PNG. Only a concerted new effort will enable PNG to progress on the achievement of the EFA goals and provide its people with education of good quality.







*(Continued from inside front cover)*

RWS found the need for pursuing a vigorous, evidence-based policy advocacy to build shared understanding and rally civil society organizations (CSOs) around common goals, establish credibility with opinion-framers and decision-makers, marshal evidence as part of a systematic strategy to influence policy, and supply missing data on excluded and unreached sectors. Campaign calls and messages needed to be supported by credible evidence, based on the real state of education in communities.

### Asia-South Pacific Education Watch Initiative and Publications

These publications are the result of education watch processes initiated and pursued since 2006 by the RWS programme of ASPBAE and GCE, in partnership with national education coalitions from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea.

Building on the successful Education Watch model implemented by CAMPE in Bangladesh, the Asia-South Pacific Education Watch (EdWatch) was designed and coordinated by the RWS Steering Committee composed of ASPBAE, Education International, and GlobalMarch Against Child Labor, and the RWS Asia Pacific staff.

EdWatch has emerged as an independent, citizen-based monitoring mechanism for assessing the status of education at the regional, national, and local levels, providing well-founded bases for advocacy and education campaign work and strengthening CSO capacities for policy engagement in education. It is designed to track governments' progress in achieving quality education for all, with focus on addressing the education deficit for disadvantaged sectors.

### Challenge to Civil Society

The daunting education situation in the region poses a challenge to CSOs to sound a clear wake-up call to governments to shake off their complacency, go beyond rhetoric, summon the political will, and redouble efforts. There is a crying need to assess existing education programmes, allocate more funds and resources for education, and institute targeted measures to address education disadvantage.

Since Dakar 2000, CSO participation in EFA processes has seen the progressive growth in strength and maturity of national education coalitions, and their developing capacity to conduct research and policy analysis and advocacy. Armed with their EdWatch findings, CSOs and education stakeholders can put together more coherent education policy agenda for lobbying, disseminate information to enhance public awareness of education issues, effectively engage governments in education planning and policy-making, and strongly assert and sharpen CSO and stakeholders' participation in education governance at all levels.

**–ASPBAE**





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