# The Development of Tertiary Education in the Eastern African Region

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By

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To my husband Nick Ituku Kamere, daughters Dr. Julie Gathoni Ituku and Peace Mwende Ituku, and my parents Julia Mwende and Norman Musyoka Masai...you are the wind beneath my wings. To my late parents-in-law Patrick and Felicitas Kamere, you continue to inspire me.  To my late brother and friend Mike Muthui Musyoka...the beat goes on!
—Isabella Musyoka-Kamere


To my late mother Marya Namaemba...without whom I would not have completed my education.
—Daniel Namusonge Sifuna


To my late father John Kombo...for the sacrifice he made and for introducing me to the world of academia.
—Kisilu Kombo

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."
—*Nelson Mandela (1918 – 2013)*

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# PREFACE

## ISABELLA M. MUSYOKA-KAMERE

At independence, most East African countries, like others in the rest of Africa, placed considerable importance on education as a conduit to attaining economic, political, and social development. Consequently, there was rapid expansion of the education systems and access in most newly independent nations, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels, chiefly to meet the demand for qualified human resource capital. Reforms in the education sector were aligned to the social, economic, and political aspirations of the independent states. In some countries, Africans had been restricted from accessing higher education during the colonial period, and even where there were exceptions, such opportunities were few and preserved for special groups. The post-independence governments therefore sought to leverage on education access as a social policy intervention, both to redress colonial disparities in the socio-economic space and to achieve 'modernization.' The ensuing rapid expansion of education at this higher tier came with attendant negative and positive ramifications. While the escalation of tertiary institutions managed to increase opportunities for higher learning and increase the human resource base, it also had some negative effects, such as compromising the quality of education, as well as giving rise to mass accumulation of highly educated unemployed graduates.

This book, which is anchored on the Development of Tertiary Education in the East African Region, gives a readable digest of tertiary education in five East African countries namely Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi. The book has seven chapters, and is authored by three seasoned scholars, together employing various approaches to give an in-depth account of tertiary education at three levels, namely, Teacher Education and Training, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and University Education in the five countries. The book also discusses the various educational reforms, reviews, frameworks, and events impacting on educational progress in the region, together with the challenges faced and mitigating measures adopted. It dedicates a chapter to present new thoughts and directions in the education sector. This is intended to challenge governments, higher education institutions, education providers, donors, and other stakeholders to prepare for the trajectory higher education is taking

and identify the support that the region needs as it finds a niche in the evolving global higher education platform. The book notes that institutions of higher learning in the East African region are part of a global network, performing a role as powerful drivers of change, social transformation, economic development, and political advancement and, therefore, must themselves be transformative and adaptive in order to meet Africa's distinct needs as well as diverse global needs.

The chapters provide up-to-date perspectives and content, with comparative illustrations and graphical representation of the issues, presented in a simple and straightforward style to construct a near pictographic account of the development of higher education in the East African countries. It is a useful text and scholarly reference book, used by students of education pursuing degree programmes both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels; diploma courses and other non-graduate students; tutors, lecturers and researchers; scholars in education; education managers, policy makers and planners; and readers with interest in the history and development of education in the East African region. The literature demonstrates experiences encountered by the East African countries as they attempted to construct their higher education ideals, against a backdrop of serious socio-political challenges, yet in many cases emerging with a strong measure of resilience, creativity, innovation, invention, and discovery, to make significant gains. Sound policy and success in technology, among other notable areas, are cited as key pillars of success. The book presents a 60-year journey of formal education, from the end of colonization, wading through a disruptive "nascent" period encountered during the early years of independence, and settling into relative maturity in later years, often preceded by what is acceptably known as a "second liberation" experience, which is marked by efforts to overcome socio-political setbacks such as political unrest, ethnic warfare, forms of discrimination and poverty.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# CHAPTER ONE

# EDUCATION IN EAST AFRICA SINCE INDEPENDENCE

# DANIEL N. SIFUNA

## Introduction

East African countries like many other African countries placed considerable importance on the role of education in promoting economic, political and social development after the achievement of independence. This resulted in the rapid expansion of the education systems, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels to provide qualified human resources for the expanding economic and administrative institutions. Educational reforms were also undertaken to reflect the aspirations of the independent states. The expansion and reform in the education systems were inspired by political and economic realities of some of the countries in which Africans had restricted opportunities for higher education during the colonial period as well as external factors emanating from western economic expertise and donor agencies. The post-independence governments therefore sought to use educational provision as a social policy intervention; both to redress colonial disparities in socio-economic development and achieve 'modernization.'

This chapter focuses on the educational policy framework; key educational developments drawing examples from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda; universalization of basic education; the Dakar World Education Forum; the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and their achievements.

### *Educational policy framework*

The educational policies pursued by the different countries very much depended on their colonial experiences. In Kenya and Zimbabwe for example, policies reflected the segregation of education, with priority given to the white community. Like many of the developing countries at the time, East African countries placed considerable importance on the role of education to promote economic and social development. The education

systems were expected to fulfil two basic objectives: the technical objective of furnishing future workforce with the requisite skills and knowledge; and the social objective of inculcating values which contribute to the enrichment of peoples' lives. These were considered essential to the maintenance of cohesive productivity. This approach treated economic growth as the principal goal of development and therefore stressed the potential of education in fostering the knowledge, values and skills necessary for productive activities. In line with this perspective, the African countries devoted the early years of independence to the rapid expansion of educational facilities and the provision of qualified persons to man their burgeoning economic and administrative institutions and educational reforms aimed at promoting the efficiency of the school system in relation to production (Sifuna and Oanda, 2014).

This perception was in great measure promoted by donor agencies. The 1960s were designated as the First Development Decade by the United Nations, in which educational planning concentrated resources in the production of highly skilled human resources. In the Report of the Conference of the African States on the Development of Education in Africa which met in Addis Ababa in May 1961, under the joint sponsorship of UNESCO and the Economic Commission for Africa, for example, emphasis was on the importance of meeting the high level human resource requirements of emerging nations. Although Kenya was not yet independent, it was one of the thirty-nine African states participating in the conference. The goal of the Addis Ababa Conference was to provide a forum for the African states to decide on their priority educational needs and to promote economic and social development on the continent. The Conference Report stressed Africa's need for more and better educational opportunities and suggested, as a general goal, that the substance of education be adapted to fit the era of independence. Although mention was made of the need for agricultural training and community development, the report emphasised academic reforms such as the inclusion of African history and culture in the curriculum, and the importance of meeting the high-level human resource requirements of emerging nations.

In determining priorities, the report assigned greatest urgency to secondary and post-secondary education, stating that this must be put before the goal for universal primary education if, for financial reasons, the two were not compatible. Primary and adult education were to be developed at the same time with the goal of universal education by 1980. The report also pointed out the need for massive financial commitment. It estimated that in order to meet their needs, African nations would have to allocate an increasing

percentage of their national income to education. Massive amounts of external aid would be required to supplement the African efforts and it called on UNESCO as well as developed countries and non-governmental organisations which had taken part in the conference to support and share in the implementation of the proposed plans (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa/UNESCO, 1961). Other conferences on a similar theme were later held in Paris, Tananarive, and Kinshasa (Sifuna and Oanda, 2014).

Among the key factors which influenced this trend, were the human capital and modernisation theories, and the need to replace the upper and middle level foreign personnel who had directed administration and commerce since the colonial period. The human capital and modernisation theories postulated the existence of fixed relationships between the formal acquisition of educational and vocational qualifications and occupational skill requirements. These theories which were largely advocated by economists from Western industrialised countries provided the theoretical justification for the high expectations placed on formal education as "the engine of growth." The general understanding was that the lack of high level and middle level human resource development was a major bottleneck to economic growth and unemployment in the less industrialised countries and was largely of a structural nature due to shortage of human resource. To illustrate the efficacy of investment in formal education and training as being essential to high and sustained rate of growth, the experience of the United States of America, Japan and more recently Korea were cited to support the causal link between training and growth (Simmons, 1980).

Apart from the human capital and modernisation theories which lay behind the expansion of formal education systems during the early years of political independence in most of the African countries, human resource planning was also dictated by the need to provide local replacements for expatriate personnel. The need for localisation necessitated human resource planning and training, thus underwriting the intense pressures arising from both politicians and populations at large, for a rapid expansion of the formal education and training systems. Even after the localisation had been completed, existing stocks of skilled occupations were still considered to be woefully inadequate to meet the requirements of the development process.

The expansion and reform of the education system were also motivated by political pressures. Almost every politician and election manifesto leading to independence elections called for more educational opportunities of all types, which included cheaper or free education, universal primary

education (UPE), the Africanisation of syllabuses and of teaching staff, as well as a change in the atmosphere in which the African personality and culture could flourish (Furley, 1972).

## *Key Educational Developments*

The above policy documents guided educational development in East Africa for decades after independence. In Kenya, for example, the first education report (Ominde Commission Report) of 1964 and Sessional Paper No 10 of 1965 on 'African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya' (Republic of Kenya, 1964) placed emphasis on human resource development. The Education Commission of 1964 chaired by Prof. Simeon Ominde of University College, Nairobi, was to survey the existing educational resources in Kenya and advise the government on the formulation of national policies for education. The independent government was therefore given a clear road map to place the main emphasis on the expansion of higher levels of education and gear them towards human needs of the modern sector of economic life while at the same time providing facilities for a slower, but steady expansion, of primary education.

Education for workforce development, however, met its objectives within only a few years after independence. The Africanisation of the civil service was virtually complete, and because of the limit imposed on the absorptive capacity of the modern urban sector, opportunities for employment began to decrease steadily from around 1965. In fact, from 1967 it became increasingly difficult for those with only secondary school education and university graduates of the arts, humanities, and social science faculties to find jobs in the modern urban sector. While the education system could not be held entirely responsible for producing a large number of unemployable school leavers, it was clear that the course of action chosen by the government after independence both intensified and perpetuated the pre-independence values about the function of education, which made it more difficult for the products of the education system to find alternative employment that could enable them to contribute to the national reconstruction of society (Tugan, 1976).

It was noted that by the beginning of the 1970s, over 20,000 secondary school leavers began competing for a much smaller number of vacancies in higher education and training, and employment in Kenya. Over a quarter of that number could spend a year or more trying to find an opening to employment. For several years, the output of secondary schools had been growing faster than the number of jobs customarily available to school

leavers and the saturation point had already been reached by 1968. Before that time, less than one percent of a representative sample of secondary school leavers normally failed to find employment or training. But in 1968, the percentage was estimated to have shot up to 14.8 percent. This was because between 1964 and 1968, the number of Fourth Form leavers rose from 6,455 to 12,835 per year, an increase of about 98 percent. Over the same period, Kenya's economy grew by 20 percent, a rate which compared favourably with many developing countries, but far below the expanding supply of school leavers (Kinyanjui, 1974).

Throughout most of the 1970s and the 1980s, the economies of developing countries, mostly in Africa, were hurt as exports declined and the domestic cost of production rose, and the major importers reduced their purchase of goods from overseas. African governments reacted to this worldwide collapse in commodity prices by borrowing heavily from other governments and multilateral banks at both market interest rates and concessional (exceptionally low) rates. But much of the money borrowed was spent on programmes that did not benefit the poor like purchasing weapons, large scale development projects, and private projects benefiting government officials and a small elite class. This created a vicious cycle where developing countries responded to the ever increasing oil prices by more borrowing until their debts became unsustainable and most indicated by the early 1980s that they were unable to service their debts, thus triggering global panic and recession. For example, Kenya maintained healthy growth with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) averaging 6.5 percent between 1963 and 1973, and a debt servicing ratio of total export of goods and services of over 10 percent by 1972. However, the oil crisis distorted this growth as government resorted to borrowing to solve the balance of payment (BOP) crisis. The growth rate decelerated to only 2.9 percent in 1975, and although there was a temporary reprieve due to the 1976/77 coffee boom, the second round of oil price increases in 1979 and a sharp deterioration in world commodity markets led to a stagnation of the country's export earnings and the debt-servicing ratio began to explode. There was also persistent drought in the 1980s which led to food imports, made possible by availability of external loan finance, thus increasing interest rates on international loans which raised the debt service expenses substantially (Sifuna and Oanda, 2014).

Meanwhile at individual country level, the oil crisis and the subsequent borrowing sprees of governments had caused another social crisis. By the mid-1970s, there was a growing realization that the gap between the rich and poor countries continued to widen. At the national level in many

developing countries in general, and Africa in particular, the gap between the rich and the poor also continued to widen. The era of optimism had ended with oil shocks, when most countries had to spend very heavily on the purchase of petroleum products; and the end of the so-called "golden age" of low unemployment and low inflation in the Northern economies, which in turn led to a continued crisis throughout the 1980s. The dependent Southern nations' fragile economic structures were very seriously undermined by the effects of economic contraction in the north and the double explosion of oil prices. With their apparently weakened economies, the Northern countries began to raise more critical questions about the so-called development assistance. The new and viable development policy was perceived to be structural adjustment with its promises of revitalized markets and increased exports. The discourse was not just confined to economic structures, but also focused on state provision of basic services which included health and education.

In response to the economic crisis of the 1970s, the Third World block of countries, under the umbrella of the Non-Aligned Movement and Group of 77, encouraged by the broad ideals of the United Nations' Charter, demanded alternatives to the existing patterns of economic and political relations, including new mechanisms of international economic regulation to ensure stable economic prices and access to developing countries' trade to First World Markets, the direct redistribution of global wealth from North to South and the transfer of global economic decision-making to the more democratic United Nations institutions. Their challenge culminated in the United Nations' General Assembly resolution for a "New International Economic Order" (NIEO). The United Nations therefore became the focus for increasingly vocal demands of transnational social movements as well as non-governmental organizations that were helping to open up economic and political avenues (Mundy, 1979).

The structural adjustment programmes (SAPS) which countries such as Kenya were forced to implement by the World Bank and other lenders in the 1980s were ideally not development blueprints. Rather they were a set of economic reforms that the developing countries had to implement to ensure they had money to continue servicing their debt obligations and avoid a large-scale global debt default. What, ideally, the reforms entailed for developing countries were cutbacks in government commitments in the social sector such as educational expansion, which commitments had been an important pact between the governments and their people at the dawn of independence.

It, however, needs to be emphasized that Africa's socio-economic problems have been exacerbated by the ruling elite which replaced colonialism with a neo-colonial status, which was a process whereby former colonial powers still extend their influence and dominance over the political and economic matters of Africa. Neo-colonialism eroded the prospect of genuine independence by strengthening the dependency of African states on their former colonial rulers. In terms of economic development, the structures that were put in place during the colonial era were left intact. What has often been referred to as economic expansion and growth has largely meant increasing cash crop production and mineral extraction. There has been no meaningful industrialization, hence very little diversification in the export trade, let alone processing their so-called raw materials before export. The ruling African elite perceiving that it has very little to offer in terms of effecting change to alleviate the poverty of its people and thereby stem discontent, devised different means of holding on to power including tinkering with the constitution, repression, and corruption, which normally takes the form of falsifying election results in which losers are declared winners, and the embezzlement of public funds. It is now admitted that corruption is quite rife in the entire African body politic (Adekele, 1997).

However, because of the debt burden, the SAPs imposed on African countries by the IMF/World Bank and the shift in the educational funding arrangements by the World Bank, African governments' support to the social sectors including education was severely reduced. There was increasing evidence showing a steady decline in the education sector in many of the developing countries. For Africa in particular, both the gross and net enrolment ratios had overall fallen considerably during the 1980s. In Kenya for example, with the introduction of cost-sharing policy in 1989 because of the IMF/World Bank imposed socio-economic conditionalities, the GER dropped from an all-time high of 95% in 1990 to around 78% in 1995. This was largely because educational expenditure per head was sharply cut in real terms. For example, between 1981 and 1989, actual expenditure per head on education fell by 67 percent in Nigeria and Zambia; by 60 percent in Tanzania; and many other African countries demonstrated a similar trend (Stewart, 1996).

An important policy implementation which, however, had profoundly serious implications on access and quality of primary education was the World Bank/IMF Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Taking Kenya as example, the World Bank, through the International Development Agency, from the late 1980s began assisting the Kenya government to implement the Structural Adjustment Programme. This was done through

the Education Sector Adjustment Credit System (EDSAC). The principal objective of the EDSAC (1990-1991 to 1995-96) was the implementation of Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1988. Among other things, EDSAC recommended the reduction of the growth rate of the education recurrent budget to sustainable levels (Government of Kenya and UNICEF 1992). In an attempt to reduce the substantial expenditure on education, the government shifted this expenditure to the beneficiaries by introducing the cost-sharing policy in 1988. This policy called upon parents and the school communities to finance capital development and the recurrent expenditure of public primary and secondary education. The government's main responsibility was payment of teachers' salaries (Sifuna and Oanda, 2014).

This policy greatly contributed to the decline in public expenditure on education, especially at the primary school level. Currency devaluations had the effect of raising the prices of all imported education supplies, including paper for printing of textbooks. As a result of the SAPs, public expenditure per primary school pupil in Kenya was estimated to have declined by about 40 percent and continued to decline with increasing economic crisis (World Bank, 1989). Increasingly, warning bells were being sounded about the declining Gross Enrolment Rates (GERs). This was despite the steady rise in the Net Enrolment Rates (NERs). According to the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) records, primary education participation reached an all-time high of 95 percent in 1989, and thereafter it started a gradual decline in the participation rate, reaching 79 percent in 1995 (National Council for NGOs, 1997). By the turn of the century, it had dropped to around 72 percent. It also needs to be mentioned that the decline in the GER also coincided with the rapid expansion of public universities as the Kenya government seemed to concentrate more expenditure on that sector compared to primary and secondary education.

Despite the recommendations of the report, the cost-sharing policy continued to exert immense pressure on parents as it was their responsibility to purchase pupils' and teachers' books. Under the 8-4-4 education system introduced in 1985 in Kenya, all subjects were examinable (except physical education), and schools usually demanded that parents purchase all the required books. Most parents, especially in the rural areas, often found it difficult to purchase such books because of the high costs. One survey estimated that about 4.2 million primary school children were in need of textbooks but only 3 percent of the amount needed to purchase their books was provided (Abagi and Odipo, 1997).

Tanzania pursued a similar trend of educational development, especially during the first several years of its independence. Tanganyika's *Three-Year Development Plan, 1961-1964,* placed highest priority on secondary and higher education because of the "obvious economic benefits" that would accrue. Because it was assumed that "no direct economic benefits" flowed from primary school development, the plan stated that there would "not be an increase in the number of places available for children entering standard one."

The commitment to the production of high-level workforce was reinforced by a number of developments. First, the government decided to adopt the manpower planning techniques pioneered by American economists, notably Frederick Harbison and Charles A. Myers in their book entitled, *Education, Manpower and Economic Growth: Strategies of Human Resource Development* (Harbison and Charles, 1964), which were found to be pertinent to the country's planning; second, through the request by the government in 1962, the Ford Foundation seconded a specialist to conduct a detailed study of the country's middle and high-level manpower requirements and means of meeting them. The report urged that "all possible emphasis should be given to the development of secondary and technical education for more students as fast as teachers and facilities become available." The report strongly influenced the educational sections of the *Five-Year Development Pan 1964-1969* (United Republic of Tanzania, 1965). Targets for secondary, technical and higher education were set, with the argument that "whereas there was a satisfactory percentage of young people benefiting from primary education, the percentage of young people benefiting from secondary or technical education was woefully inadequate for running the administrative and economic machinery of the country efficiently in the near future" (Morrison, 1976). This order of priorities remained virtually unchallenged until after the Arusha Declaration in 1967. The new focus for the development process was formulated as the strategy of Socialism and Self-Reliance of the same year. Central to this strategy was Education, which placed emphasis on the rural sector development of the economy. The new strategy placed greater emphasis on primary and adult education, who's recurrent and development budget increased as that of secondary education dropped between 1966/67 and 1980/81 (Buchert, 1994).

It needs to be mentioned that in the mid-sixties Tanzania made a major departure in its political system by embracing socialism, or *ujamaa* in Kiswahili, as its ideology for development of the country. This ideology also meant radical changes in education by the promulgation of Education

for Self-reliance. This implied introducing self-reliance activities and political education in the school curriculum and diversifying the curriculum away from general education towards vocational subjects including agriculture. Education for Self-reliance (ESR) remained the main guiding policy on education in the country until 1995 (Nyerere, J. K, 1968). The 1995 Education and Training Policy (ETP) is regarded as the official departure from the policies of ESR, corresponding with the broader changes in national economic and political policies also taking place in the 1990s. The introduction of ETP saw a shift in the educational system toward a general education approach, away from vocational approach emphasized in ESR, and began to actively work towards the expansion of access to secondary education and higher education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1995).

In Uganda, as a result of two decades of war and civil strife, the education system, especially at lower levels, suffered from years of neglect. This resulted in poor quality and low enrolment for an exceedingly long time. For example, 50% enrolment at primary school level and high drop-out rates (7.8% in lower grades), high attrition rate of 50% and low completion rate of around 35% at primary school level, and dramatic differences in enrolment between geographical regions. There was also a marked shortage of classrooms resulting from the destruction of classrooms during the 1970s coupled with the rapid rise in enrolment. A deliberate effort had to be made to put up additional classrooms. In 1997, the government declared free Education for four children per family. Where applicable, 50% of this number was to be girls as it continued to encourage families to send all their school going age children to school.

## *Universalisation of Basic Education*

Internationally the early 1990s marked an important watershed in the universalisation of basic education. First, there was the *World Conference on Education for All (EFA)* of 1990 also known as the Jomtien Conference which directly responded to the declining enrolments and quality of primary education. The conference reiterated the right of every child to education and emphasized the responsibility of every government to provide education to all its citizens. It also drew the government's attention to the need to focus on the right of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups such as girls, children out of school, and children in especially difficult circumstances to access education. This was followed up through the *World Education Forum* of 2000, the *Beijing Platform of Action* of 1995, and the *Millennium Development Goals* of 2000. These international conventions

and instruments, among others, set goals for achieving universal basic education by 2015 which spurred many developing countries, including Kenya and Tanzania, to put in place strategies not only for the expansion of basic education but also to increase access and participation, as well as to improve its quality. This represented a resurgence of interest by governments in the attainment of Universal Primary Education (UPE). To better understand this new global education making architecture and how it has influenced education policy making and implementation in developing countries like Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, we briefly discuss the design and implementation of the *Dakar, EFA framework* of Action and UN *Millennium Development Goals* (Sifuna and Oanda, 2014).

### *The Dakar World Education Forum*

The World Education Forum which was held in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000 was sponsored by five convening agencies, namely UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, and the World Bank. Participants included delegates from 164 nations as well as representatives of the sponsoring agencies, NGOs and other agencies and groups with interest in global education issues. It was noted that while the World Conference on Education for All in 1990 had set the goal of achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE) by the year 2000, and although some progress had been made in some regions, the goal had not been realized by all the countries.

In the final deliberations, the World Education Forum adopted a Framework of Action committing the concerned governments to "the achievement of education for all (EFA) goals and targets for every citizen and for every society." The forum characterized the Dakar Framework as "a collective commitment to action" and specified mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to coordinate the global push for education for all. The participants also committed themselves to finding the financial support necessary to assure that "no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by lack of resources." While citing the significant progress made towards education for all, the Framework added that it was unacceptable that in the year 2000, more than 113 million children had no access to primary education, that 880 million adults were illiterate, that gender discrimination persisted, and many children and adults were denied access to the skills and knowledge necessary to be full participants in their societies (UNESCO, 2000).

The Forum participants collectively committed themselves to attaining six specific goals to EFA as follows:

- Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
- Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
- Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.
- Achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
- Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.
- Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy and essential life skills.

In order to achieve these six goals, the delegates pledged to collaborate on a number of broad strategies. These included an over-arching plan to "mobilize strong national and international political commitment for education for all, develop national action plans and enhance significantly investment in basic education." Another broad strategy was to "create safe, healthy, inclusive and equitably resourced educational environment conducive to excellence in learning, with clearly defined levels of achievement for all." Specific strategies included linking education for all policies to anti-poverty and development efforts, collaboration with institutions of civil society, and devising of new and improved educational accountability systems (UNESCO, 2000). These strategies largely reflected the concerns of the increasingly global policy environment in the education sector.

The Dakar forum expected countries to prepare comprehensive National Education for All (EFA) Plans by 2002 at the latest. The plans were supposed to be integrated into a wider poverty reduction and development framework. Countries were also required to establish budget priorities reflecting a commitment to achieving EFA goals and targets as soon as