

Goal 2 — Achieve universal primary education

Global context

Access to education is today viewed as a basic human right as well as an essential element for both human and social development. Data indicate that the goal of universal primary education is far from being met: net primary school enrolment and/or attendance figures show only about 60% of children from least developed countries (LDCs)¹ and 80% from all developing countries attend school. This contrasts with a figure of 97% for industrialised countries.²

Pacific context

Many PICs have reported rates of net primary school enrolment well in excess of the average figure for developing countries (although rates do vary significantly, with a low of 56%). Despite success in achieving high enrolment, weaknesses do persist within PIC education systems, indicated by figures on drop-out and repeating, and basic numeracy and literacy rates.³ There is evidence from across the region that a large number of youth leave school without adequate life skills and are unable to either further their education or gain employment.⁴ Identified problems include alienation of and poor performance by students, and poor financial support for basic education.⁵ Although PICs vary in terms of their patterns of participation in education and achievement levels, constraints and issues of concern are generally shared.⁶ These include:

- Economic constraints;
- Difficulties posed by large distances and remote communities, which result in high service delivery costs;
- Problems with the quality of education service delivery. Contributing factors include staffing shortages and the lack of adequate teacher training;
- Competing demands from different sectors of education. There are demands for both increased resources for and better results from the both the non-formal and formal education systems (with the latter including primary, secondary and tertiary levels), and demands for resources for early childhood education, education for the disabled, etc.
- Curricula that are not seen to be relevant to Pacific Island cultures; and
- Education outcomes that do not match the needs of many students.

¹ Fifty countries are presently classified as LDCs. The UN General Assembly decides on the countries to be included in the list of LDCs, based on criteria that address income, human resources and economic vulnerability. In the Pacific, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu are LDCs.

² UNICEF 2003.

³ PIFS 2001.

⁴ Pongi 2004.

⁵ PIFS 2001.

⁶ Pongi 2004.

Table 2.1 Goal 2 — Achieve universal primary education

Indicators	Year	Cook Is	Fiji	FSM	Kiribati	Marshall Is	Nauru ^a	Niue	Palau	PNG	Samoa	Solomon Is	Tokelau ^a	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu
Target 3 6. Net enrolment ratio in primary education	1990		92 (1986)	93.7 (1994)	76.2	89.7 (1988)	75.1 (1992)		<u>81.8</u>	<u>66.3</u>	82 (1991)	39 (1986)		91.6 (1986)	98.2 (1991)	74.5 (1989)
	2000	92.3 (2001)	94.7	92.3	93.5	84.1 (1999)	60.3 (2002)	90.2 (2001)	<u>76.2</u>	<u>77.4</u>	87 (2001)	56 (1999)		89.4 (1996)	99.6 (2002)	78.2 (1999)
7. Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5	1990	<u>100</u> (1986)	91.4 (1996)		98	<u>88</u> (1988)				58.1		85 (1991)		84	95.8 (1993)	90.2 (1991)
	2000	<u>98.2</u> (1996)	88.4 (2002)	<u>66.9</u>		<u>86.1</u> (1999)	<u>92</u> (2002)	<u>90.5</u> (2001)		56.8	84 (2001)					91.2
8. Literacy rate of 15-24 year-olds	1990			<u>71</u> (1994)	<u>92</u>	<u>74</u> (1989)	<u>95</u> (1992)			<u>60.6</u>	<u>96</u> (1991)	<u>62</u> (1991)			<u>95</u> (1991)	<u>34</u> (1989)
	2000	<u>99</u> (1996)	<u>93</u> (1996)					<u>≈100</u> (2001)	<u>91</u> (1995)	<u>61.7</u>	<u>99</u> (2001)		<u>86.5</u> (2003)	<u>99</u> (1996)		

Underlined figures report data that do not precisely correspond to the indicator as defined by the UN. See notes below (for additional details as well as definitions and sources see Goal 2 Technical and Source Notes at end of chapter).

Indicator 6: Net enrolment rates are derived from census statistics, using primary school age groupings as defined by countries. In addition, figures for Palau report net enrolment ratio for elementary level schooling; figures for PNG are the gross enrolment rate.

Indicator 7: 1986 figure for Cook Islands reports the highest level of schooling completed by those aged 25 and over; 1996 figure for Cook Islands is the highest level of schooling for those aged 15 and over. Fiji 2002 figure is provisional. Figure for FSM is for proportion of adults that have completed primary school. Figures for Marshall Islands are calculated as the number of persons aged 6-13 not attending school whose highest grade was grade 5 or below, divided by the total number aged 6-13; because the age group is higher than that called for by the indicator this data are indicative only. Nauru figure is the proportion of adults completing primary school. Niue figures are for school attendance among youth aged 10-14.

Indicator 8: Information reported is a proxy for literacy, measuring the proportion of adults aged 15 years and over who had less than four years of formal education. Source: 1999 Pacific Human Development Report (UNDP 1999a). Exceptions: PNG (figure is indirect and based on educational achievement among 15-24 year olds); Solomon Islands (figure is based on 1991 adult literacy survey); Samoa and Tokelau (from country data).

Target 3: Ensure that by 2015 children everywhere boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

MDGI 6. Net enrolment ratio in primary education

	1990	2000
Cook Is		92.3
Fiji	92.0	94.7
FSM	93.7	92.3
Kiribati	76.2	93.5
Marshall Is	89.7	84.1
Nauru	75.1	60.3
Niue		90.2
Palau	<u>81.8</u>	<u>76.2</u>
PNG	<u>66.3</u>	<u>77.4</u>
Samoa	82.0	87.0
Solomon Is	39.0	56.0
Tonga	91.6	89.4
Tuvalu	98.2	99.6
Vanuatu	74.5	78.2
Average (by country)	79.8	83.4

Underlined figures report data that do not precisely correspond to the indicator as defined by the UN. See Goal 2 Technical and Source Notes for details.

Assessment

The net enrolment data in this report have been derived from census statistics, using primary age groups as defined by countries (for specific age groupings see Goal 2 Technical and Source Notes). Consequently, these enrolment rates should be considered to be estimates of (i.e. “crude”) net enrolment rates.

Time series data, based on census figures, are available for 12 of the 15 PICs. Those countries that reported high rates of enrolment (90 per 100 children of primary school age or more) in 1990⁷ show little change, with the exception of the Marshall Islands, where enrolment has declined by 6%. A significant decline (20%) was recorded in Nauru (from 75 per 100 to 60), while enrolment has increased in Vanuatu (by 5%), Kiribati (23%), PNG (17%) and Solomon Islands (43%). According to the most recent data, a total of seven PICs had enrolment rates of approximately 90 per 100 or higher.

The regional average has increased by 4.5%, from 79.8 to 83.4 per 100 between 1990 and 2000. Net enrolment in nine PICs currently exceeds the regional average, while the figure for five PICs falls below it; the declines in Palau and Nauru are significant. A portion of the decline for Nauru may be due to a change in the age group (for Nauru 1992 data cover 5-11 years, the 2002 figure is for 5-9 years).

⁷ Note actual years vary from 1986-1991, as shown in Table 2.1.

MDGI 7. Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5

Table 2.3 Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5		
	1990	2000
Cook Is	<u>100.0</u>	<u>98.2</u>
Fiji	91.4	88.4
FSM		<u>66.9</u>
Kiribati	98.0	
Marshall Is	<u>88.0</u>	<u>86.1</u>
Nauru		<u>92.0</u>
Niue		<u>90.5</u>
PNG	58.1	56.8
Samoa		84.0
Solomon Is	85.0	
Tonga	84.0	
Tuvalu	95.8	
Vanuatu	90.2	91.2
Average (by country)	87.8	83.7

Underlined figures report data that do not precisely correspond to the indicator as defined by the UN. See Goal 2 Technical and Source Notes for details.

Assessment

Time series data are available for only five PICs, and four show slight declines in the survival rate from grade 1 to 5, with only Vanuatu recording a slight increase. Among the eight PICs for which recent data are available, five show survival rates of approximately 90% or higher. The average survival rates for PICs that are shown are not directly comparable because of the lack of time series data, but the more recent average is 4.7% below that recorded for 1990.

Contributors to school drop out include low quality of schooling, discouragement over performance and the costs of education. Students' progress to higher grades may also be limited by the availability of teachers, classrooms and educational materials⁸. A study in Fiji⁹ found that failure to attend school was due primarily to financial difficulties. Poverty was often

compounded by low educational levels of parents as well as family problems such as single-parent families and children being left with relatives, particularly grandparents.

The proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5 is not the most directly applicable measure in the Pacific, where most primary schools go to grade 6. Changing the indicator to measure survival through grade 6 would make it significantly easier to measure through education-related questions in national censuses.¹⁰

MDGI 8. Literacy rate of 15-24 year-olds

The youth literacy rate reflects the outcomes of primary education over the previous decade for the "youth" age group that should have completed at least primary (elementary) level education. As a measure of the effectiveness of the primary education system, it is often seen as a proxy measure of social progress and economic achievement.

Assessment

Most of the figures presented in Table 2.4 are based on a proxy for literacy (completion of primary school), and are measured among adults, as accurate data regarding literacy among 15-24 year olds are not available. Exceptions are Papua New Guinea (figures are based on educational achievement, but for 15-24 year olds) and Solomon Islands (based on an adult literacy survey). Limited series data are available for this indicator, and no accurate recent data are available for a number of PICs. The

⁸ Pressure on educational resources in FSM and Marshall Islands is such that there are two "shifts" of students, one that uses classrooms in the morning and the other in the afternoon.

⁹ Quoted in Tavola 2001.

¹⁰ Information for the indicator on the proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5 is not widely available in the Pacific. Some education authorities collect information about drop outs and repeaters, but migration makes deriving reliable estimates difficult. This indicator can be estimated using a "cohort" analysis of census data (if detailed questions are asked), where the number of pupils in grade 1 is taken from a first census, and divided by the number of pupils in grade 6 or above from the next census in five or more years time. It needs to be stressed that this is only a very crude proxy to estimate primary school completion. Because it does not account for migration, this measure should not be used in high migration environments.

information that is presented suggests that eight PICs have achieved literacy rates of 90% or higher between 1990 and the present. Note that due to the proxy measure used, the literacy rates reported here are not measures of the quality and adequacy of the literacy level needed for individuals to function in a society.¹¹

Table 2.4 Literacy rate of 15-24 year-olds (%)

	1990	2000
Cook Is		<u>93</u>
Fiji		<u>99</u>
FSM	<u>71</u>	
Kiribati	<u>92</u>	
Marshall Is	<u>74</u>	
Niue	<u>95</u>	<u>≈100</u>
Palau		<u>91</u>
PNG	<u>61</u>	<u>62</u>
Samoa	96	99
Solomon Is	<u>62</u>	
Tokelau		<u>87</u>
Tonga		<u>99</u>
Tuvalu	<u>95</u>	
Vanuatu	<u>34</u>	
Average (by country)	76	89

Underlined figures report data that do not precisely correspond to the indicator as defined by the UN. See Goal 2 Technical and Source Notes for details.

More direct measurements of literacy have returned significantly different results, and these suggest that there is a high level of “hidden illiteracy” resulting in a significant proportion of children completing school but still lacking basic literacy skills.¹² The Pacific Island Literacy Level test, introduced in 1994 as part of the Basic Education Life Skills (BELS) project,¹³ developed the following definition for literacy (with a similar corresponding definition for numeracy):

Literacy: The confident appropriate and accurate use of spoken and written language for the wide variety of personal public and creative uses demanded by the society in which the user lives.

Students in 11 PICs were tested at end of year 4, both at the beginning (1994) and end (1998/2000) of the project. Results indicated that about one-third of students had “hardly achieved any” of the basic literacy and numeracy skills expected (these students were

defined as being “at risk”), and less than 10% acquired most or all of the basic literacy and numeracy expected. Figures were roughly equal at the start and end of the BELS project, indicating that there had been no improvements over the life of the project, despite the effort and resources expended.¹⁴

Challenges and prospects related to achieving universal primary education in the Pacific

Many PICs have effectively achieved (or are close to achieving) the goal of providing universal primary education, when measured in terms of enrolment and completion rates. Others (particularly PNG and Solomon Islands) face significant challenges, particularly in view of their high population growth rates.¹⁵

Providing universal primary education that effectively addresses both individual and societal needs is a challenge across the region. Forum Education Ministers have identified an “urgent need to address the provision of education” to deliver better quality outcomes.¹⁶ They identified a number of areas where improvements are needed, including: the competence and confidence of teachers; curriculum programmes; quality and relevance of teaching materials; teaching methods and learning styles; school

¹¹ Questions regarding ability to read and write have been included in a number of Pacific censuses, but these questions do not provide the type of literacy information sought (i.e. a person “can, with understanding, both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life.”) Census questions do not “test” literacy in this way, but generally ask only broad questions referring to people’s reading and writing ability in their mother tongue or other languages. For this reason census literacy data have not been included in this section of the report. Note that census literacy data have been used for Goal 3, MDGI 10.

¹² Pongi 2004.

¹³ The project was conducted in 11 PICs.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ McMurray (2002) made a simple projection of the number of new classrooms needed each year in order to keep pace with population growth (assuming 30 students per class), deriving the following numbers for PICs with rapid growth rates: Fiji: 439; Kiribati: 48; Marshall Islands: 33; Papua New Guinea: 4,589; Solomon Islands: 382; Vanuatu: 164.

¹⁶ PIFS 2001.

management and culture; relationships between education providers and stakeholders; quality of school buildings; and assessment procedures.

Pacific Island leaders have shown a continuing commitment to improving and expanding access to education, and have committed to meeting internationally agreed-upon education-related goals, including the education-related MDG targets and the Dakar 2000 Education for All Framework for Action. Within the region Pacific Islands Forum Education Ministers have adopted the Forum Basic Education Action Plan – 2001. The plan’s goals include achieving universal and equitable educational participation and achievement, ensuring access and equity, and improving quality and outcomes.¹⁷ Ministers have committed themselves to improving “all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence for all,” so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills. They have also committed to ensuring that skills taught through training centres and non-formal education programmes match the requirements for employment and livelihood in the traditional subsistence economy, and have recognised the need to improve data and information collection and retrieval systems to provide accurate, timely, and relevant data, in part through valid and reliable assessment procedures. Progress in implementing the plan will be reviewed on a biennial basis. In addition, the 15 PICs are participating in the five-year, Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education (PRIDE) project, which seeks to improve the quality of basic education planning and implementation processes in each PIC.

PICs have also jointly agreed to address the issue of education for children with disabilities, and have committed to try to increase the primary school completion rate among children with disabilities to 75%.¹⁸

Assessment of the relevance of MDGs 6, 7 and 8 and the availability of data

The goal of achieving universal primary education (measured in terms of enrolment) has been reached or is on the way to being achieved in much of the region. The challenge of providing universal primary education that effectively addresses both individual and societal needs remains, however; progress toward this goal is not measured effectively through the existing MDG education-related indicators. Measurement of progress in meeting objectives established in the Pacific Islands Forum Basic Education Action Plan – 2001 would provide a valuable complement to the standard MDG indicators.

Data availability for MDGI 6 (net enrolment) is good. Data availability for MDGI 7 (proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5) could be improved with modification of the indicator as recommended. Data availability for MDGI 8 is very poor. Literacy could be more effectively measured through assessments of educational outcomes, as recommended.

Recommendations relating to the achievement of universal primary education

- Develop an alternative indicator to MDGI 7 (proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5) to measure the proportion of pupils who start grade 1 and reach 6 (primary school completion rate) and develop key indicators to capture quality and relevance of education.
- Develop additional indicators that measure progress in achieving objectives outlined in the Forum Basic Education Action Plan – 2001 (e.g. improvement in educational outcomes such as literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills, and success in providing skills required for employment and livelihood in the traditional subsistence economy).

¹⁷ PIFS 2001.

¹⁸ PIFS 2002a.

Goal 2 Technical and Source Notes

MDGI 6: *The net enrolment ratio in primary education* is the number of pupils in the official age group for a given level education enrolled in that level, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group. It is intended to show the extent of participation in primary education by primary age pupils. Note that net enrolment refers only to children of official primary school age (gross enrolment includes children of any age.)

Sources: Cook Islands: 2001 data from Cook Islands Statistics Office 2001 Census (reports 5-10 year age group attending primary school). Fiji: Fiji Draft MDG Report 2004. FSM: 1994 data from FSM Department of Economic Affairs, 2000 figure from 2000 census (6-13 year-old age group). Kiribati: data from Kiribati Department of Statistics (1990 figure for 5-14 year-olds; 2000 figure for 5-12 year-olds, derived from census). Marshall Islands: RMI Economic Planning, Policy and Statistics Office, 1988 and 1999 Censuses (6-13 year old age-group). Nauru: Nauru Bureau of Statistics; 1992 figure reports 5-11 year-olds and 2002 figure 5-9 year-olds, derived from census. Niue: Niue Statistics Office, 2001 census (5-9 year-olds). Palau: Palau Office of Planning and Statistics, 1990 and 2000 census (reports on elementary schooling, which includes 5-14 year-old age group). PNG: MDG TWG 2004, reports gross enrolment rate. Samoa: Samoa Draft MDG Report 2004. Solomon Islands: Solomon Islands Department of Statistics, 1986 and 1999 Censuses (5-14 year-old age group). Tonga: Tonga Department of Statistics, 1986 and 1996 Censuses (5-12 year-old age group). Tuvalu: Tuvalu Central Statistics Division, 1991 and 2002 Censuses (6-12 year-old age group). Vanuatu: Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 1989 and 1999 Censuses (6-12 year-old age group).

MDGI 7: *The proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5*, known as the survival rate to grade 5, is the percentage of a cohort of pupils enrolled in grade 1 of the primary level of education in a given school year who are expected to reach grade 5. The indicator measures an education system's success in retaining students from one grade to the next.

Sources: Kiribati, Solomon Islands, and Tonga figures from UN HDR 2003. Cook Islands: Cook Islands Statistics Office; 1986 figure is for highest level of schooling completed of those aged 25 years and over; 1996 figure from census, is for highest level of schooling completed of those aged 15 years and over. Fiji: Fiji Draft MDG Report 2004. FSM: FSM Department of Economic Affairs, 2000 Census (is for adults completing primary school). Marshall Islands: RMI Economic Planning, Policy and Statistics Office, 1988 and 1999 Censuses (estimated as the number of persons aged 6-13 not attending school whose highest grade was grade 5 or below, divided by number aged 6-13; as the age group is higher than the indicator this is indicative only). Nauru: Nauru Bureau of Statistics, 2002 Census (for adults completing primary school). Niue: Niue Statistics Office 2001 census (is for school attendance among 10-14 year age group). PNG: MDG TWG 2004 (reports the cohort retention rate). Samoa: Samoa Draft MDG Report 2004. Tuvalu: UNESCO. Vanuatu: figure for 1991 from ADB; figure for 2000 from Vanuatu National Statistics Office (estimate is based on the reconstructed cohort method, which uses data on enrolment and repeaters for two consecutive years).

MDGI 8: *The literacy rate of 15–24 year-olds*, or the youth literacy rate, is the percentage of the population ages 15–24 years-old who can both “read and write with understanding” a short simple statement on everyday life.

Information reported is a proxy for literacy, and measures the rate of completion of primary school, as measured among adults.

Sources: Pacific Human Development Report 1999, adult literacy rate. Exceptions: Niue: Niue Statistics Office, 2001 census; PNG: MDG TWG 2004 (figure is indirect and based on educational achievement among 15-24 year-olds); Solomon Islands: Solomon Islands Department of Statistics (figure is based on

1991 adult literacy survey); Samoa: Samoa Draft MDG Report 2004 (adult literacy); Tokelau: Tokelau Statistics Unit, 2003 census.