



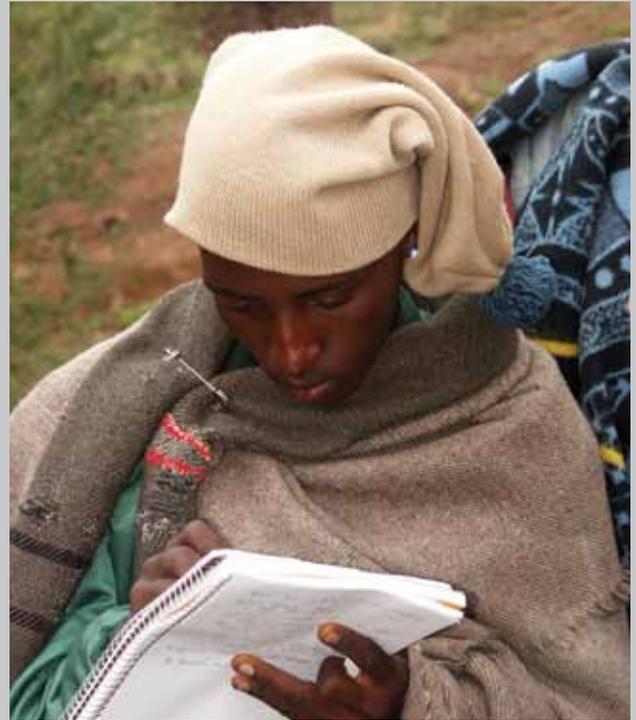
**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



Educational Quality Improvement Program  
Classrooms • Schools • Communities

# FIRST PRINCIPLES: DESIGNING EFFECTIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

## DIGEST



Credit: American Institutes for Research

Substantial progress has been made toward universalizing primary education in developing countries in the past decade. Net enrollment in these countries increased from 80% of the primary school-aged population in 1999 to 86% in 2007. In Sub-Saharan Africa, where the gains were the largest, enrollment increased during this period from 56% to 73%. In the same time period, the number of school-aged children out of primary school in South and West Asia was halved (UNESCO, 2010). Although these achievements are laudable, progress in many countries is still too slow to achieve the targets set by the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 (UNESCO, 2000).<sup>1</sup> In many instances, enrollment gains at national levels have not automatically trickled down to bring large numbers of children from marginalized populations into school. In most countries, Education for All (EFA) has now become a matter of “reaching regions and populations that are

<sup>1</sup> The Dakar Framework states as its goal 2 “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.”

persistently underserved and attaining levels of equity and demonstrable learning that traditional education systems have failed to meet” (Destefano, Moore, Balwanz, & Hartwell, 2007, p. 14).

The underserved could be considered educationally marginalized groups. UNESCO’s 2010 *EFA Global Monitoring Report* defines marginalization in education as “a form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities.”<sup>2</sup> These groups of people are educationally marginalized, and thus underserved, for three overarching reasons: *relational* (who they are and how they relate to society at large and/or the dominant groups), *locational* (where they reside), and *situational* (their conditions). See Table I.

<sup>2</sup> In this digest, it is assumed that groups are underserved primarily because of some form of marginalization. “Underserved” can also be considered “educationally marginalized”; these two terms are used interchangeably.

Membership in multiple marginalized groups has a compounding effect and in turn constitutes additional layers of disadvantage. For example, although twice as many poor in Yemen (ages 17–22) have less than 4 years of schooling when compared to the national average, three times as many poor women have less than 4 years of schooling compared to poor men. Similarly, rural poor Nigerians average less than 4 years of schooling, but the rural poor Hausa people of Nigeria average less than 1 year. For rural Hausa women, the average approaches zero years.

Current efforts in many countries will be insufficient to bring all children from marginalized populations into school by the Dakar Framework’s 2015 deadline. The goal will not be achieved simply by stepping up these efforts—through increased funding to, and expansion of, conventional education delivery systems—because these systems are inadequate to the task. Reaching these underserved groups constitutes what economists call the “last mile problem,” which is a persistent challenge experienced by a group (in this instance, the underserved) that is unsolvable by traditional approaches. Its solution requires flexibility and innovative approaches that can be sustained over time, which in turn depend on political will and resources.

TABLE 1: TYPOLOGY OF EDUCATIONALLY MARGINALIZED GROUPS

Reason for Marginalization	Type of Marginalized Group	Examples of the group and the percentage of the population aged 17–22 who are educationally impoverished* (compared with total population)
Relational (who the people are)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religion</li> <li>• Ethnicity/culture</li> <li>• Language</li> <li>• Caste</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethnic Kurds in Turkey: 30% &lt; 4 years of education (5% for total population)</li> <li>• Speakers of Jaua in Mozambique: 90% &lt; 4 years of education (33% for Portuguese speakers)</li> </ul>
Locational (where they reside)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remote rural</li> <li>• Informal urban (slum dwelling)</li> <li>• Migrant (seasonal or permanent)</li> <li>• Nomadic/pastoral</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents of Chiapas, Mexico: 26% &lt; 4 years of education (11% for total population)</li> <li>• Karamojong pastoralists in Uganda: 85% &lt; 2 years of education (17% for total population)</li> </ul>
Situational (their conditions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor</li> <li>• Orphaned/affected by HIV&amp;AIDS</li> <li>• Physically/intellectually challenged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The poorest 20% of people in many nations have &lt; 4 years of education at double the rate of the overall national population.†</li> </ul>

\* Less than 4 years of education, unless indicated; adapted from 2010 EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010 (UNESCO, 2010); data for latest available years

† For example, Cambodia, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Yemen.

# 7 KEY PRINCIPLES FOR PROVIDING QUALITY EDUCATION TO UNDERSERVED POPULATION

This section presents key principles that are essential for successful programming in this area. These principles are based on tested interventions that have been effective in providing a quality basic education to underserved groups. These principles were generated through a consultative process among field practitioners, academicians, and nongovernmental organization (NGO) program officers, and also are supported by scholarly literature.<sup>3</sup>

## 1. The sociopolitical context needs to be conducive to providing education for underserved groups.

Although most countries are committed officially to the goals of EFA, the political will to meet these goals varies by country and for different underserved groups within countries. A thorough situational assessment is needed to ascertain that target groups are not educationally marginalized because of other forms of marginalization (see Table 1) that are too sensitive or too impractical (e.g., cultural, political, or religious dynamics) for external agencies to address.

## 2. Focused and targeted programming is needed to reach educationally marginalized populations.

Targeted, direct inputs of national and state government or international development assistance to highly marginalized groups are required. To identify and target areas with concentrations of underserved groups, data systems that disaggregate along appropriate criteria are a prerequisite.

## 3. Working in partnership with existing local institutions often yields the best results.

Successful education programming for underserved children builds partnerships among government, local NGOs, and communities so that their complementary strengths can enhance the impact of the interventions. The key is to build on and complement, rather than replace, existing systems and structures. Locally managed and inter-sectoral approaches are more-efficient and more-sustainable than those that depend on centrally managed systems to allocate personnel, materials, and resources.

## 4. Participatory program planning that allows flexible local approaches is required.

Appropriate national government policy and political will are necessary preconditions to expanding access to educationally marginalized populations. National-level policy should, however, entail a flexible project design for local stakeholders to develop some of their own programming content that is based on local needs. Such stakeholder-driven development ensures local ownership, engagement, and sustainable programming.

<sup>3</sup> The literature is reviewed in a companion compendium piece that is part of this *First Principles* series.

## ABOUT THE FIRST PRINCIPLES

This *First Principles: Designing Effective Education Program for Underserved Populations Digest* provides an overview and guidance for designing and implementing programs that support marginalized and disadvantaged populations. The principles, steps, and indicators are primarily meant to guide program designs, including the development of requests for and subsequent review of proposals, the implementation of program activities, and the development of performance management plans, evaluations and research studies. The *First Principles* are intended to help USAID education officers specifically, as well as other stakeholders—including staff in donor agencies, government officials, and staff working for international and national non-governmental organizations—who endeavor to bring educationally marginalized populations into school and achieve true education for all. The guidance in this document is meant to be used and adapted for a variety of settings to help USAID officers, educators and implementers overcome the numerous challenges in reaching the hardest to reach populations. The last section provides references for those who would like to learn more about issues and methods for supporting the education of the underserved. This *Digest* version is a brief overview of key considerations for supporting education for underserved populations. For those who are interested in knowing more, a longer companion piece called a *Compendium* provides greater depth for this topic.

## 5. Schools must be affordable and accessible, and demand for them may need to be enhanced.

Because of the nature of a group's marginalization (e.g., poverty, remoteness, language barriers; see Table 1), school participation among the underserved is low and problematic. Program designs that aim to address low participation rates thus need to consider both supply-side and demand-side needs within the education sector. Solving the supply problem (e.g., constructing schools, increasing the number of teachers, improving public transportation) is essential for expanding access for the underserved. Expanded access alone, however, will not guarantee increased school participation if the demand for education is low (owing to opportunity costs, cultural traditions, attitudes toward girls, etc). To address demand-side factors, then, interventions such as subsidies for direct educational costs and greater cultural sensitization to the educationally marginalized group's needs are required. School quality issues also need to be addressed to ensure supported learning (e.g., after school tutoring, continuous assessment, peer support groups). The best designed interventions address both supply-side and demand-side factors simultaneously.

## 6. Inclusive learning environments must be developed to meet the special needs of the educationally marginalized and to combat marginalization more generally.

The problems that hinder educational access and hamper classroom performance are multidimensional and include extra-classroom factors (poor health and nutrition, poverty, social stigma, discrimination) and classroom factors (language barriers, cultural norms, relevance of curricula, learning disabilities). Building inclusive learning environments through holistic programming is essential to overcoming the classroom-based factors and should be developed with an appreciation of the barriers confronting the child outside the classroom. For example, inclusive classrooms comprise not only skilled teachers, appropriate pedagogy, and materials but also teachers (professionals or volunteers) who can communicate with children in their language and understand their cultural mores.



Credit: World Education

## 7. Educational interventions should be linked to national programs that address deprivation in other sectors.

Educational marginalization results in large part from mutually reinforcing sources of deprivation (including extra-classroom factors such as poor health and nutrition, poverty, social stigma, and discrimination), and there are limits to how much of this deprivation can be addressed by improved education systems alone. There is thus a need to coordinate with national programs in other sectors, such as health, food security, and poverty alleviation, to meet these basic development needs of underserved groups.

# 10 STEPS IN IMPLEMENTING AN IN-SERVICE PROGRAM

This section outlines the steps in implementation of educational programming for underserved groups based on the principles.

## 1. Conduct a situational assessment.

If the existence of disparities in educational access among different groups has been determined, and reaching these underserved groups is a programmatic priority, the first step is to conduct an assessment of the situation as it relates to the potential target groups. The essential questions include the following:

- Does the political will exist in government partners to allocate resources and focus energies on addressing the educational gaps?
- What are the implications of targeting particular groups?
- If sensitivities exist, does the agency believe that it is positioned to ameliorate the situation, and is it part of the mission of the agency to take on such challenges?

It is helpful to use a framework to guide the situational analysis, such as SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) or similar tools. Secondary sources of information include the government's data on education enrollments and country reports that are prepared and submitted to EFA.<sup>4</sup> Primary sources of information include officers of the agency that focuses on the education sector and related sectors; UN agencies and UNICEF in particular; NGO personnel who have had a long presence in the country and have had experiences with the target groups; and the Ministry of Education (and related Ministries that deal with human resources development, such as Manpower, Labor, and Health). As with all situational assessments, triangulating among various sources of information is essential.

## 2. Identify implementing partners and government "champions."

The choice of implementing partner agencies (both nongovernmental and governmental) is the foundational step. Local partners should be credible among the target communities, and preferably provide genuine representation

of the target communities' voice. At the same time, early efforts should be made to identify influential program champions within government departments who believe in the program goal and who will provide an entry point to later efforts to establish official links and government endorsement.

## 3. Select target areas and target communities.

Reliable data management systems need to be in place to identify target areas with high numbers of underserved children who remain outside formal schooling. Data requirements for target area selection should include data disaggregated by age and grade, gender, socio-economic status or ethnicity, dropout rates, promotion rates, enrollment rates, completion rates, number of children out of school, number of schools, pupil-teacher ratios, and other demographic indicators. Successful education programs for educationally marginalized populations often need to begin by assisting government departments in establishing and maintaining these data systems.



Credit: James MacNeil/World Education

<sup>4</sup> Available on UNESCO's website at <http://www.unesco.org/education/wef/countryreports/country.html>



Credit: World Education

Local and central government departments, NGOs, and representatives from the marginalized groups should be involved in selecting the target areas. Data to assess the interest and readiness of communities to bring about increased participation in education can be gathered through site visits, meetings, and focus group interviews by using tools that are custom developed for the task and standardized for replication where appropriate.

#### **4. Establish or form partnerships with local committees, partners and working groups.**

Establishing partnerships may include holding orientations, forming inter-sectoral working groups, and gaining official recognition from and forging connections with the government for these groups. Roles and responsibilities should be formalized and training provided on topics relevant to the tasks and duties that respective groups will undertake. The local nature of these working groups can be invaluable for mobilizing the community and for bringing long-term, community-level changes in attitudes and practices toward providing a quality education for all children, including the underserved.

#### **5. Conduct program planning locally, using participatory processes.**

This process should begin by providing support to the working groups in conducting situational analyses to understand why underserved groups are not accessing education. Using these analyses, working groups identify key issues, set objectives, and choose activities that aim to expand access to quality education for the target groups. Once familiar with the approach and the benefits of this process, working groups and communities become better able to design, in collaboration with schools, quality interventions for the underserved.

#### **6. Select target children.**

Various tools and strategies have proved effective in targeting educationally underserved children, such as mapping, accessing school and government local records, and conducting house visits. Underlying all is the need for selection processes and criteria to be locally endorsed. To ensure transparency and accountability, community representatives from all target communities should be involved and play a role in shaping the selection criteria.

#### **7. Provide training and technical assistance for implementation.**

Successful education programming for reaching underserved children depends on the capacity building of service providers to ensure quality education. Training teachers, workshop facilitators, and project coordinators are examples. Programs for ethnic minority groups, for instance, can require training bilingual assistants or providing technical assistance in developing more relevant curricula. Another common example is training teachers to use child-centered teaching methodologies, which can help teachers better accommodate the diverse learning needs of educationally marginalized groups. Training should focus helping service providers create the necessary opportunities for the underserved children to succeed by developing a supportive learning environment that overcomes the limitations they may face at home.

## 8. Install quality control measures.

All successful educational programming for underserved groups has built-in systems for ongoing technical support, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation of progress along defined indicators. Supervision and support systems should be given adequate attention in budget allocation, staffing, and scheduling. Such attention recognizes that underserved groups tend to live in areas of generally low human resource development.

## 9. Set up links to government and other development agencies.

Successful programs targeting the underserved do not work in isolation. Collaboration exists at the level of central government, provincial and district governments, commune councils, local communities, and international and local NGOs. Close working relations at all levels can be established right from the start through official program launches and orientations. Local working groups can give various stakeholders important roles in school or community selection processes, approval of school or community program plans, and classroom monitoring.

For example, establishing community-teacher boards, made up of local education officials and community representatives, can be useful for overcoming objections commonly found in this type of programming about using teachers who do not have the same education qualifications as formally credentialed teachers. These boards can be given the responsibility for supervising the selection, payment, and monitoring of community teachers in collaboration with program staff. For complementary education programs, links to the formal education system are essential if children are to be reintegrated into the formal system or if their learning attainment in nonformal schools is to be officially recognized.



Credit: James MacNeill/World Education

## 10. Implement activities to document the program and disseminate program results and lessons.

To bring about lasting change that ends the marginalization of certain groups, programs need to demonstrate the need for, and the effectiveness of, their interventions. Successful programs do not approach this in an ad hoc fashion but follow a careful design of activities that begins at project start up. Additional effective activities include the use of radio, television, film documentaries, and dissemination activities organized by targeted, marginalized children themselves, such as youth forums, campaigns (community to national levels), and the provision of digital cameras. Activities by youth themselves have proved very effective in demonstrating program needs and successes.

## CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

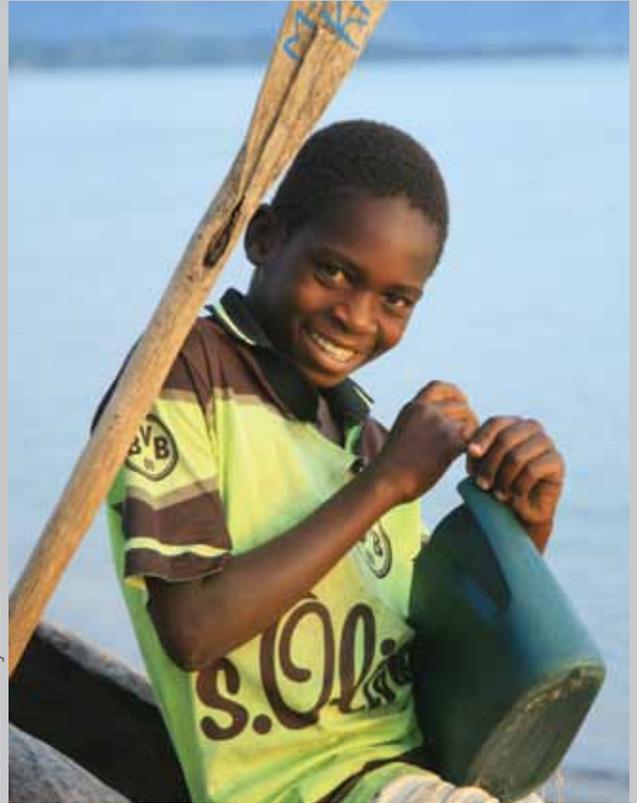
The educationally underserved tend to come from groups that are marginalized by complex and ingrained structural, cultural, and societal forces. The challenges they face in endeavoring to successfully participate in high-quality education are thus daunting.

### 1. Inaccessibility of target areas

Frequently, educationally marginalized children live in areas that are remote and inaccessible. Even where program implementation groups are village based, the inaccessibility of the areas drives up program costs. Travel to and from implementation sites for capacity building and monitoring is essential if programs are to be of good quality. The time and costs required have to be reflected in program budgets and work plans, and donors need to understand the logistical realities of reaching this target group.

### 2. High rates of program dropout because of poverty and related factors

Programs for the underserved often face high dropout rates among the children who are most in need because of the opportunity costs that school participation presents to their families. Whether covering the direct costs of their studies and stimulating parents' demand for the education of their children will suffice will depend on how families weigh these tradeoffs. Links to programs and services for household food security and improved livelihoods are essential to help bolster the household economy and lessen the urgency for children to work instead of attending school. These links might be difficult to establish, given the endemic neglect by government and development agencies for the most marginalized populations. Therefore, concerted efforts to foster these links are essential. Programs that include advocacy for increased services for these groups, or that can offer a range of development services themselves, are among the most successful in counteracting dropout. Effective programs develop additional interventions such as establishing savings and credit groups and providing entrepreneurship or practical skills training for improved income generation for target children and their families. Additionally, bolstering school quality and ensuring children have the additional in-school support to learn help parents recognize the tradeoffs in favor of education are worthwhile.



Credit: Cassandra Jessee/AIR

### 3. Inaccessibility of target areas

Frequently, educationally marginalized children live in areas that are remote and inaccessible. Even where program implementation groups are village based, the inaccessibility of the areas drives up program costs. Travel to and from implementation sites for capacity building and monitoring are essential if programs are to be of good quality. The time and costs required have to be reflected in program budgets and work plans, and donors need to understand the logistical realities of reaching this target group.



Credit: Cassandra Jesse/AIR

#### 4. Mobile populations

Underserved groups are often quite mobile. Some migrate seasonally in search of work, some are driven out of their homes as a result of discrimination or natural disasters, and others practice nomadic livelihoods. For these groups, education programming targeted at their children has to adapt accordingly. Modular curricula that allow children to integrate new classes at multiple entry points work well here, as do mobile local teachers who move with the group. Tracking these children remains a challenge, but innovative programs have developed detailed student tracking systems in response.

#### 5. Popular perceptions that alternative, complementary teaching and schooling are of lower quality

Education programs for underserved children that use community teachers, promote nonformal education methodologies, or set up nonformal community schools have to work hard to demonstrate that the quality of the education they provide is at par with, or exceeds, that of the formal system. Strategies that work to counter this perception include setting up robust educational achievement assessments of target learners based on competencies and benchmarks agreed on by government education authorities. Similarly, developing community teacher training curricula and quality control systems in conjunction with the relevant government bodies has worked well. Dissemination strategies that showcase the learning gains of targeted children, such as media features, reports, case studies, and high-level promotion events, can help. Efforts at more-local levels are also required, such as including formal education officers in the program monitoring or management groups and setting up advisory boards.

## SUGGESTED INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

### Measuring Success of Overall Program Goals at a System-wide/National Level

Education programs for marginalized groups aim to increase access to basic education of good quality. These programs might measure success in improved access at a system-wide level by collecting national- or district-level data, or both, on the number of out-of-school children, school enrollment rates, dropout rates, and completion rates. To track progress, baseline data are taken at program start and then collected each year. Overall success in improving quality of education for educationally marginalized groups is sometimes measured through grade-level achievement tests among a random sample of children from the marginalized group(s).

However, most programs tend to focus measurements among those specifically targeted by the program. Many deem it unrealistic to expect to see system- or national-level changes in improved access and quality given the program's timeframe and scale, unless it is a large program working at the national level.

### Measuring Program Success Among Target Underserved Communities

*Illustrative examples of indicators for measuring improved access:*

- Percentage of targeted children enrolled
- Targeted children's attendance rate

*Illustrative examples of indicators for measuring improved education quality:*

- Percentage of targeted children with grade-level competency
- Percentage of teachers/facilitators with adequate skills
- Percentage of classroom learning environments in target schools/communities that show improvement
- Repetition rates that decline among targeted children
- Promotion and completion rates that improve among targeted children

### ESSENTIAL READING

Banerjee, A. V., Bénabou, R., and Mookherjee, D. (Ed). (2006) *Understanding poverty*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Destefano, J., Moore, A. S., Balwanz, D., & Hartwell, A. (2007). *Reaching the underserved: Complementary modes of effective schooling*. Washington, DC: EQUIP2/Academy for Educational Development.

UNESCO (2010) *2010 EFA global monitoring report: Reaching the marginalized*. Paris: Author.

- Percentage of target schools that refine school processes, methodologies, and curricula to make them more appropriate to marginalized children
- Improved representation of minority groups among teachers

*Measuring changes in community/government attitudes, awareness, and action to address the educational needs of underserved children:*

- Percentage of targeted underserved communities taking voluntary action to ensure educational access for out-of-school children (e.g., providing alternative classroom venues, making house visits)
- Perception about schools/education among community members that improves with respect to school management and school's responsiveness to minority cultural needs
- Number of policies regarding education for underserved groups informed and influenced by the program

## REFERENCES

- American Institutes for Research. (2008). *Assessing marginalization of Cham Muslim communities in Cambodia* (Report for EQUIPI, USAID). Washington, DC: Author.
- Destefano, J., Moore, A. S., Balwanz, D., & Hartwell, A. (2007). *Reaching the underserved: Complementary modes of effective schooling*. Washington, DC: EQUIP2/Academy for Educational Development.
- Dyer, C. (Ed.). (2006). *The education of nomadic peoples: Current issues, future prospects*. Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books.
- Hartwell, A., et al. (2004). *The challenge of achieving education for all: Quality basic education for underserved children* (EQUIP2 Issues Brief). Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development.
- Poverty Action Lab. (2006). *Making education work for marginalized children: Evidence from an inexpensive and effective program in India* (Policy Briefcase No. 2). Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Department of Economics, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab.
- Soares, S., et al. (2007). *Conditional cash transfers in Brazil, Chile, and Mexico: Impact on inequality* (Working Paper No. 35). Brasilia, Brazil: International Poverty Centre.
- UNESCO. (2000). *The Dakar framework for action: Education for all: Meeting our collective commitments*. Paris: Author. Available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147E.pdf>
- UNESCO. (2010). *2010 EFA global monitoring report: Reaching the marginalized*. Paris: Author.



Credit: World Education



## PRODUCED BY

American Institutes for Research  
In partnership with  
World Education, Inc.

By

Estelle E. Day, Ed. M.  
D. James MacNeil, Ed. D.  
Kurt E. Bredenberg, Ed. M.

June 2011

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Yolande Miller-Grandvaux, EQUIPI AOTR  
US Agency for International Development  
Phone +1 202-712-5207  
[ymiller-grandvaux@usaid.gov](mailto:ymiller-grandvaux@usaid.gov)

Cassandra Jessee, EQUIPI Deputy Director  
American Institutes for Research  
Phone: +1 202-403-5112  
[cjessee@air.org](mailto:cjessee@air.org)

*First Principles: Designing Effective Education Programs for Underserved Populations* is part of a series called *First Principles*, which provides guidance for programming in a range of topics in education and development. Topics in the series include:

- Community Engagement
- Early Childhood Development
- Gender
- In-Service Teacher Professional Development
- School Health
- Standards and Assessment
- Curriculum and Instructional Materials Development
- Education for Underserved Populations
- ICT in Education
- Pre-service Teacher Education
- School Management and Leadership Development