Foreword

A quality education throughout life is the birthright of every woman, man and child. In turn, education, particularly that of girls and women, aids progress across all development goals. Since the adoption of the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals in 2000, remarkable progress has been made in education worldwide, and much of it in some of the world’s poorest countries. Millions more children are in school, making the move from primary to secondary education, and gender disparities in primary and secondary school enrolments are narrowing. However, the slowing of primary enrolments globally coupled with high dropout rates and a critical shortage of teachers – especially in sub-Saharan Africa – means much work remains to be done to protect and build upon those gains. The aftermath of the global economic crisis threatens to further erode the education advances made in the past decade . Against this backdrop, increasing access to education requires strong political will and a corresponding improvement in quality, along with a workforce of well-trained and motivated teachers and targeted actions to reach marginalized and excluded groups. UNESCO’s mandate covers all facets of education. The Organization offers guidance and expertise to policy-makers and other stakeholders, and helps countries to plan, build and rebuild education systems that are responsive to a rapidly changing world. In particular, UNESCO leads the global Education for All movement, and promotes a holistic and inclusive vision of lifelong learning that includes early childhood care and education, primary, secondary and higher education, youth and adult skills, adult literacy, gender parity and quality education.In collaboration with its many partners, UNESCO is intensifying efforts to pursue this valuable mission to make quality education a reality for all, so that each and every one of us has the chance to realize our full potential and enjoy better health, improved living standards, and fuller social and political participation in society.Qian Tang, Ph.D. Assistant Director-General for Education

Worldwide, more people than ever before are benefiting from an education. Over 1.5 billion children and youth are enrolled in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools and universities. From 1999 to 2008, an additional 52 million children enrolled in primary school. The number of children out of school was more than halved in South and West Asia, and in sub-Saharan Africa enrolment ratios rose by almost one-third. Access to education is steadily expanding; across developing countries, enrolment in higher education has risen sharply, and innovative literacy and adult education programmes are transforming the lives of the disadvantaged. But a number of obstacles, including poverty, still keep 67 million children of primary-school age out of school, 53 per cent of whom are girls and almost 43 per cent of whom are in sub-Saharan Africa. Enrolment rates are slowing and being eroded by dropout, particularly in countries affected by armed conflict where over 40 percent of out-of-school children live. Gender disparities continue to hamper progress in education. Around 17 per cent of the world’s adults – 793 million people, of whom two-thirds are women – still lack basic literacy skills. Millions struggle to learn in overcrowded classrooms, without textbooks or qualifed teachers. An additional 2 million teachers will need to be recruited by 2015 to achieve universal primary education, more than half of them in sub-Saharan Africa.