



Education opens doors



“Education can be the difference between a life of grinding poverty and the potential for a full and secure one; between a child dying from preventable disease, and families raised in healthy environments; ...between countries ripped apart by poverty and conflict, and access to secure and sustainable development.”

—Nelson Mandela and Graca Machel

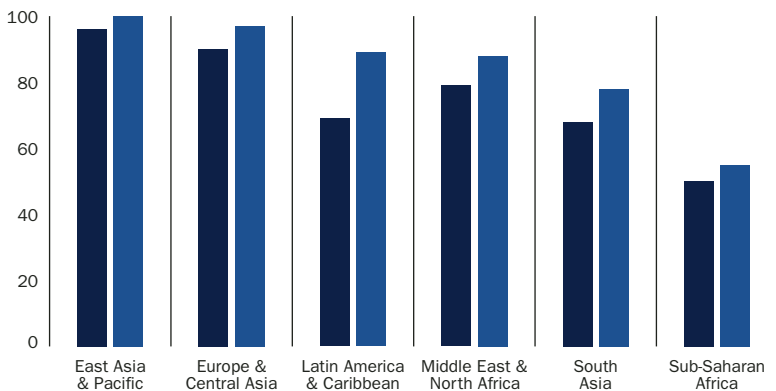
Given education’s role in development, the Millennium Development Goals call on the world to ensure a complete course of primary education for all children by 2015. Primary completion rates—the proportion of each age group finishing primary school—directly measure progress toward this goal.

One region, East Asia and Pacific, has already reached the

target. Three other regions, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Middle East and North Africa, are on track to achieve the goal. But two regions, with more than 100 million school-age children, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, are in danger of falling short. Sub-Saharan Africa lags farthest behind, with little progress since 1990.

Primary school completion rates are improving everywhere but are still low in some regions

Primary completion rate, total, 1990 and 2002 (%)



Enrolling children and keeping them in school

To reach the Millennium Development Goal for education, countries must first enroll all school-age children. Then they must keep them in school throughout the primary cycle. For this, countries need to understand why students drop out and then remove the impediments to keeping them in school. Possible impediments include household demands on boys’ and girls’ time, the opportunity cost of sending boys and girls to school (such as lost earnings from income-generating activities), and aspects of the supply of schooling, including quality and cost. In every country completion rates are lowest for children from poor families and for girls.

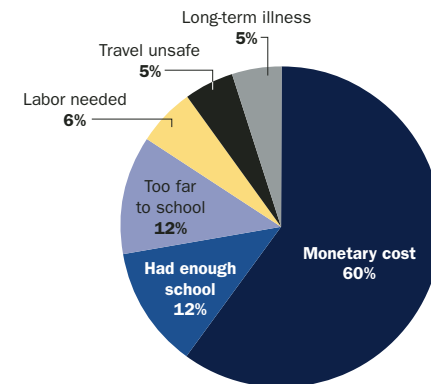
Girls’ enrollment and completion rates tend to be influenced by the time they need to complete household activities. In Burkina Faso, Uganda, and Zambia girls could save hundreds of hours a year if fuel and potable water were within a 30-minute walk, thereby freeing time for them to attend school.

If current trends persist, children in more than half of developing countries will not complete a full course of primary education in 2015. But faster progress is possible by:

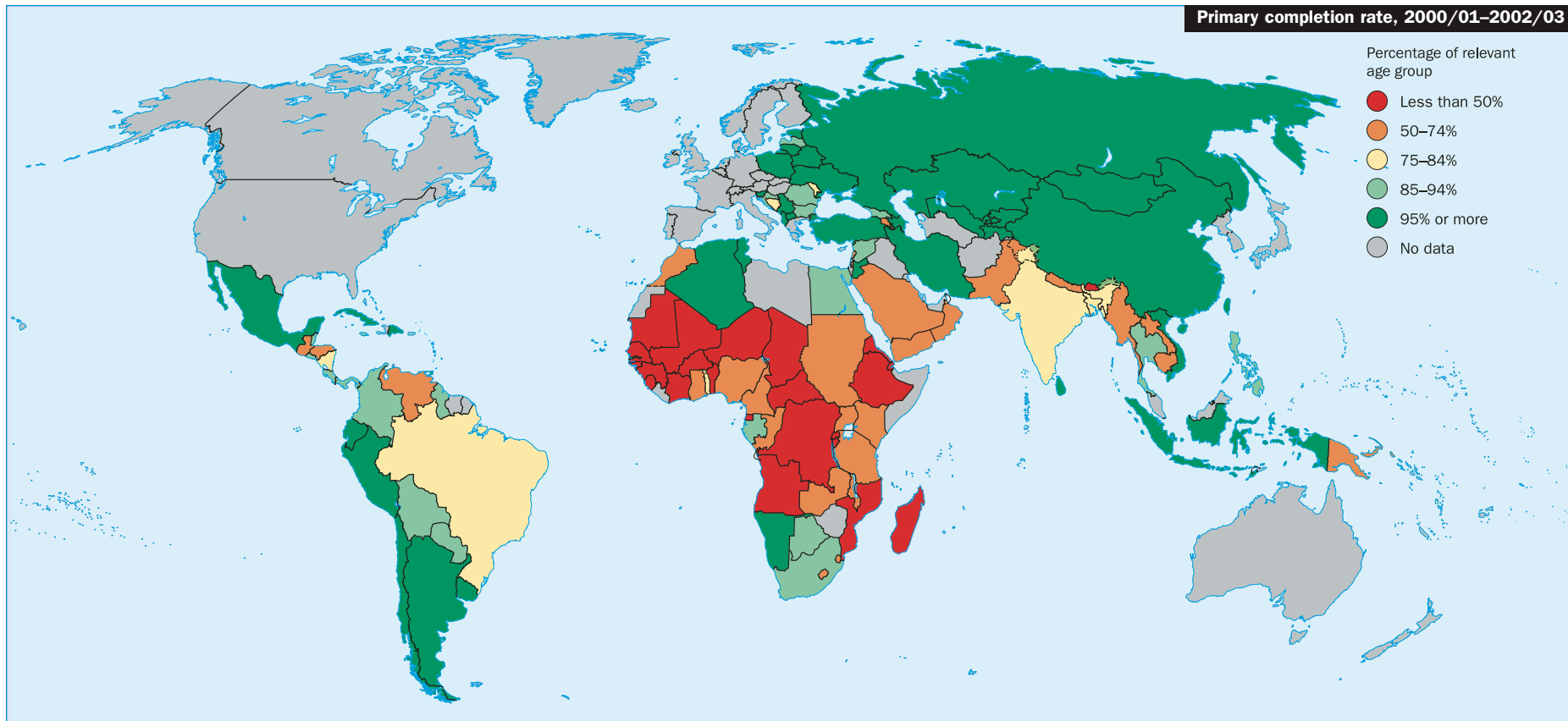
- Committing a bigger share of the budget to public education.
- Lowering school fees.
- Providing adequate complementary inputs.
- Keeping pupil-teacher ratios around 40 and repetition rates below 10 percent.

Cost is the main reason children leave before completing primary school in Zambia

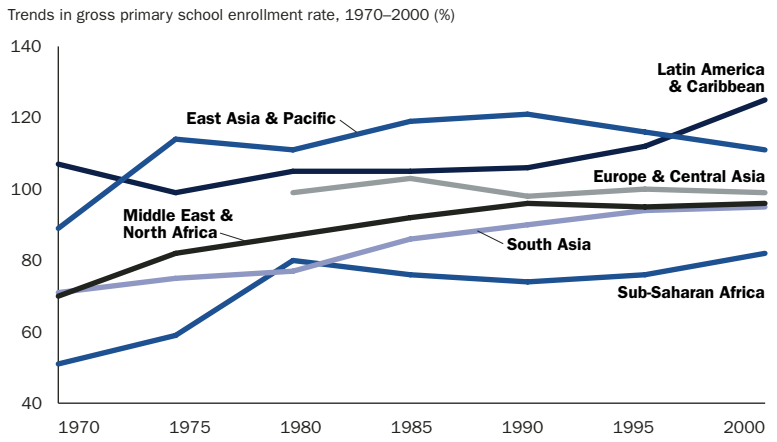
Reasons for leaving primary school, 2002



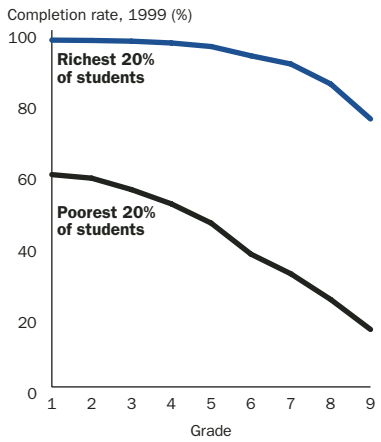
Primary completion rate, 2000/01–2002/03



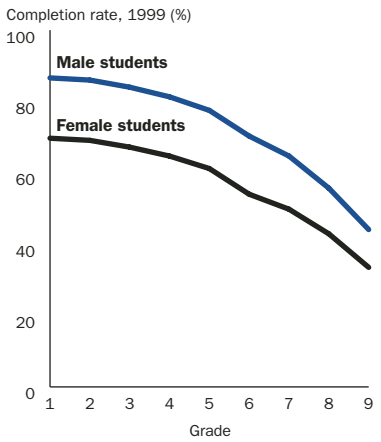
Primary school enrollment rates are approaching 100 percent—except in Sub-Saharan Africa



In India rich students are far more likely to attend school . . .



. . . as are male students



Primary completion rates measure the proportion of all children of official graduation age who complete primary school. The data are for the most recent year available.