

LEARNING FOR A BETTER FUTURE



Save the Children



A Save the Children education centre in Okhla slums, Delhi, India

Cover photo: Chotti, age six, at a centre for children living on the streets in Delhi

MASSIVE PROGRESS – BUT MILLIONS OF CHILDREN STILL LEFT BEHIND

“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.”
Nelson Mandela

THE STORY IN NUMBERS

- Today **51 million** more children are in school than in 1990.¹
- But there’s a global crisis in learning. Around the world, **one child in three** can’t read, write or do basic numeracy at the age of 11.²
- Aid to education fell recently for the first time in 8 years. The poorest countries saw a \$149 million funding drop – enough to send **1 million children** to school.³
- In Kolkata, capital of the Indian state of West Bengal, **425,000 children** are learning to read books.⁴ **500,000 children** in West Bengal are employed making bricks.⁵

There are two sides to the story of the global effort to ensure every child’s right to a decent education.

The first story is one of real progress. Today, 51 million more children around the world are in a classroom than in 1990.⁶ The number of primary-age children who are out of school has almost halved in that time. In India alone, the number of children out of school came down by 18 million between 2001 and 2008.⁷

But the second story shows that the job is only half done. Enormous challenges remain.

Around the world, there are still 57 million children not in school.⁸ In the Indian state of West Bengal there are more children working in brick kilns than are learning to read in the state capital, Kolkata.⁹

And while school enrolment around the world has gone up, we now face a global learning crisis. An alarming proportion of children who go to school are failing to learn the basics, let down by the poor quality of education on offer. 130 million children who finish primary school can’t read or do basic maths.¹⁰

The scale of the learning crisis is staggering. Around the world, one child in three can’t read, write or do basic numeracy at the age of 11.¹¹

Reading, writing and numeracy are the fundamental building blocks for children’s education. Take reading. Where children possess basic reading skills, they are more likely to improve in their other school work.¹² Conversely, many of the children unable to read are left behind, lose confidence and drop out of school.

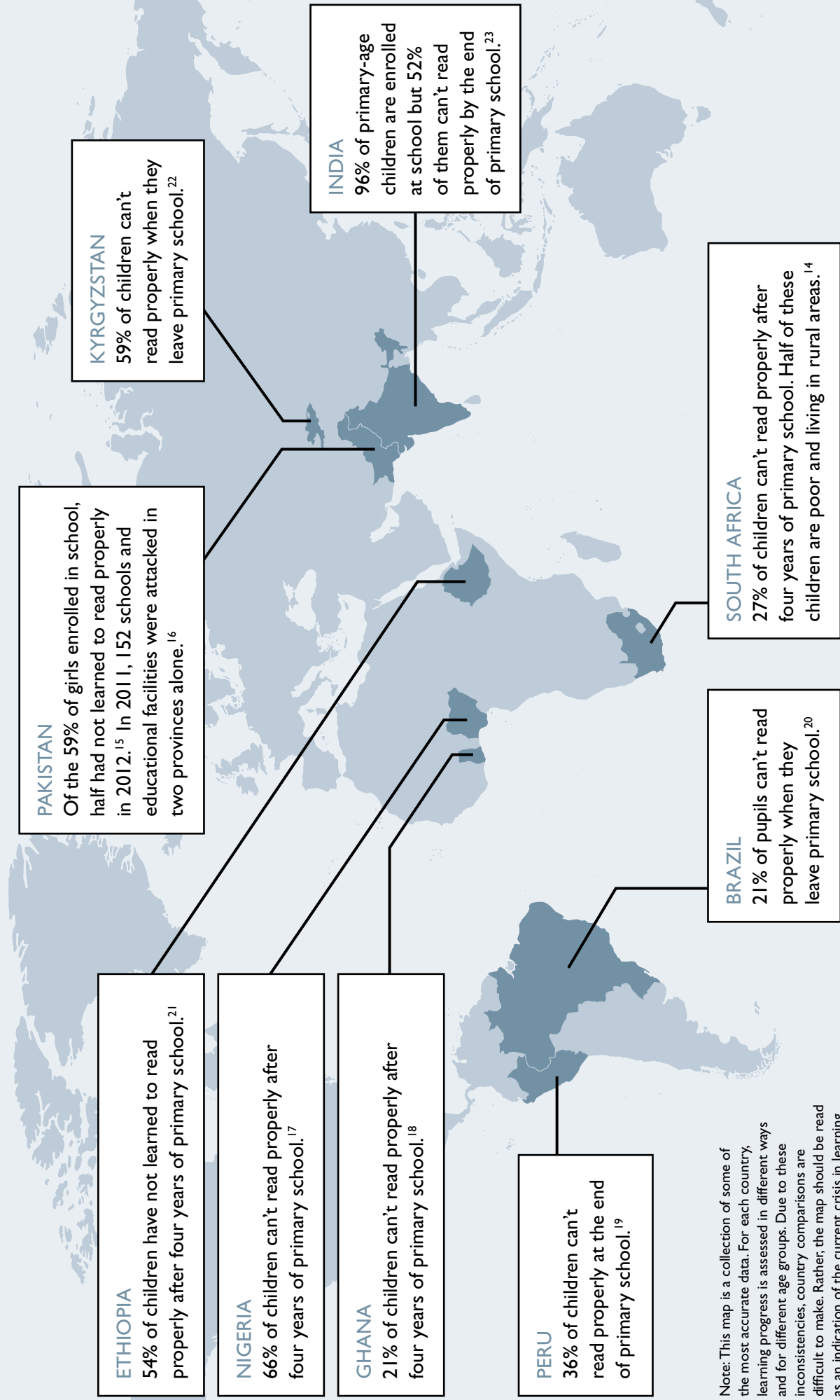
As the map on page 4 shows, it’s the poorest children, those living in rural areas, and girls who are most at risk of never learning to read. Many of them are in school but failing to learn.

And, as Save the Children knows from our work in more than 120 countries, the children most likely to miss out altogether are the most marginalised: child labourers, migrant children, those living on the streets or in countries torn apart by conflict.

It’s vital we tackle the crisis in education, and that we focus on the poorest and most disadvantaged children. All children desperately need to learn skills if they’re going to find decent work, lead healthy lives and contribute to their countries’ development and growth. **If all children left school able to read, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty.**¹³

By acting now to tackle the crisis in education, we can give every child the chance to fulfil their potential.

READ AROUND THE WORLD



Note: This map is a collection of some of the most accurate data. For each country, learning progress is assessed in different ways and for different age groups. Due to these inconsistencies, country comparisons are difficult to make. Rather, the map should be read as an indication of the current crisis in learning.

HOW WE'RE HELPING TACKLE THE GLOBAL LEARNING CRISIS

Save the Children believes every child should have the chance to fulfil their potential. We work in some of the world's toughest places to help children get an education and to give them the chance of a better future.

One of our most innovative approaches is our Literacy Boost programme. It's a way of helping kick-start children's reading by supporting everyone who has a role to play – children, teachers, parents and local communities. Teachers are trained to use games, songs and other activities to develop reading skills in young children. Parents and local communities get involved, through book banks and workshops. And every child's reading skills are measured regularly so that they get the right support and no one gets left behind.

This highly successful programme is now being used in 24 countries. In Pakistan and Malawi, children doing Literacy Boost made three times more progress in reading than their peers. Girls in Zimbabwe and Pakistan who were in the programme made nearly twice as much progress in reading as those who weren't. Children in Pakistan who took part in Literacy Boost were 92% more likely to stay in school and in Zimbabwe 74% more likely.²⁴

HOOKED ON BOOKS: LITERACY BOOST IN ETHIOPIA

Kuma, age 10, goes to the weekly 'reading camp' held under the trees in a neighbour's yard to sing songs, practice his ABCs and read books in Afaan Oromo, the local language. Around 60 children come to the sessions. Most have few or no books at home.

Reading camp teachers use a variety of activities such as letter-matching games, drawing pictures to represent letters, and reading in small groups. At the end of each session, Kuma gets to choose books to borrow. "I like books with stories about sports," he says.

Another innovative approach we're using to tackle the reading crisis is our 'camel libraries' in Ethiopia's desert Somali region. Every few weeks, isolated communities get a visit from a librarian accompanied by two camels laden with books. Our project enables thousands of children living on the margins to borrow books and develop reading skills.



PHOTO: SEHFU ASSEGID/SAVE THE CHILDREN

One of our mobile camel libraries in Ethiopia's Somali region

BOOKS NOT BRICKS

HOW WE'RE HELPING DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN IN INDIA LEARN TO READ

More than half of all primary-aged children in India can't read properly at the end of primary school.²⁵ The poorest children are most likely to miss out.

And for the millions of children who exist on India's margins, the learning crisis is particularly acute. It's estimated that 11–18 million Indian children live on the streets – and even that's likely to be an underestimate.²⁶ Millions of children have to work, many in hazardous environments.

There are 8 million children out of school. Integrating these children into age-appropriate classes remains a significant challenge. 80 million children drop out of school before completing the full cycle of elementary education.²⁷

The passing of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 marked a historic moment. For the first time, it guaranteed children the right to quality elementary education by the state. But three years after it was implemented, the Act is struggling. More than 1 million teacher posts are still vacant across the country. Education remains out of reach for the most marginalised children in India.

425,000 children are learning to read books in Kolkata.²⁸

500,000 children are making bricks in West Bengal.²⁹

Save the Children is supporting children growing up in the toughest situations, giving them the opportunity to learn and the chance of a better future. Last year we helped more than 50,000 child labourers, enabling them to learn, and helping them improve their working conditions or stop working altogether.

In West Bengal, half a million children are working in the brick-making industry. By running local education centres, we've helped more than 15,000 children learn to read, write and do basic maths, and enabled them to access mainstream education.

And in the state capital Kolkata, we've launched mobile learning centres so that children living on the streets can get basic education. Buses with books and teachers on board visit areas of the city where lots of children are out of school and many are living on the streets. Children are encouraged to read books and their levels of learning are assessed. We're aiming to help 3,000 of Kolkata's most disadvantaged children to catch up on basic learning and join local schools.

Over the next three years we aim to help **1.6 million vulnerable children** in India through education, training and personal support.

The inauguration of one of our mobile learning centres



OUR GLOBAL CALL FOR ACTION

World leaders have made a clear commitment to achieve universal primary education by 2015 – one of the UN’s Millennium Development Goals set in 2000. We urgently need to increase efforts to reach this goal. We also need to look beyond that, to ensure we get agreement to focus on getting the most disadvantaged children into school and on helping all children learn to a minimum standard.

But far from stepping up and intensifying efforts to address the learning crisis, donor countries recently reduced aid to education for the first time in eight years. The poorest countries have been hit hardest, with a **drop in funding equivalent to \$149 million** – enough to send more than 1 million children to school.³⁰

Many national governments are also failing to invest sufficiently in their children’s futures. India is one of the ten countries with the highest numbers of children out of school, but has only allocated around 10% of its budget to education – half the amount needed according to an analysis of countries that have made good progress in ensuring education for all over the past ten years.³¹

A key approach in addressing the learning crisis is a renewed focus on reading skills. More must be done to provide local language books of good quality to children, especially those who struggle to gain access to books, such as those living in hard-to-reach areas. There is an urgent need for national policies on providing such materials, along with sufficient financial investment to make them a reality.

3 KEY ACTION POINTS

In order to address the current learning crisis we call on governments to increase their efforts to ensure all children have access to school and equal opportunities to learn when there.

We are calling for:

- **International commitments to close the global education gap and reverse the learning crisis**
- **Greater funding for education from both donor and national governments**
- **Expanded literacy programmes to help the most disadvantaged children acquire building blocks for their future.**



PHOTO: PARTH SANJAL/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Children at a preschool centre in Bihar, India

ENDNOTES

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- ² UNESCO, Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2012. Only 400 million out of 650 million primary school children leave school able to read.
- ³ P Rose and L Steer, Financing for Global Education: Opportunities for multilateral action, Education for All Global Monitoring report, 2013, Center for Universal Education at Brookings and UNESCO, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002232/223289E.pdf>
- ⁴ DISE and SEMIS reports 2011–12: West Bengal, 2012, Department for Information Management System. See: http://www.semisonline.net/DiseSemisStatistics/DISE%20-%20SEMIS%20Reports_WestBengal_U-DISE_2011-12.pdf
- ⁵ G Chamberlain, Building rights, *The National*, 31 August 2009, <http://www.newseditor.co.uk/cuttings-aug31-2008.htm>
- ⁶ See note 1
- ⁷ Action Aid, India: A safe haven for street children, http://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/doc_lib/priority_projects_india.pdf
- ⁸ UNICEF/UIS, Schooling for millions of children jeopardised by reductions in aid, UIS Factsheet, no. 25. June 2012. See: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/out-of-school-children.aspx>
- ⁹ See notes 4 and 5.
- ¹⁰ See note 2.
- ¹¹ See note 2.
- ¹² Save the Children, *Literacy Boost Results; Nepal* at https://www.eddataglobal.org/documents/index.cfm/LB_Nepal_Yr_I_Final.pdf?fuseaction=throwpub&ID=463
- ¹³ See note 2.
- ¹⁴ South Africa: J W van Fleet, K Watkins and J Greubel, *Africa Learning Barometer*, 2012, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/africa-learning-barometer> These figures are based on 33.7% of children not learning and 27.2% of children not being able to read. Of the 33.7% of children 52.9% were from the poorest families and 48.2% were from rural areas.
- ¹⁵ Pakistan: ASER 2012, http://www.aserpakistan.org/index.php?func=aser_2012
- ¹⁶ Pakistan: UN estimates cited in Human Rights Watch News, 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/10/19/pakistan-protect-students-teachers-schools-attack>
- ¹⁷ Nigeria: J W van Fleet, K Watkins and J Greubel, *Africa Learning Barometer*, 2012, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/africa-learning-barometer>
- ¹⁸ Ghana: J W van Fleet, K Watkins and J Greubel, *Africa Learning Barometer*, 2012, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/africa-learning-barometer>
- ¹⁹ PISA 2009 country profiles. This figure is based on the number of children below level 1a on the PISA reading scale. Completion of level 1 is broadly equivalent to primary standard. See <http://stats.oecd.org/PISA2009Profiles/#app=85dc&d016-selectedIndex=0&73e3-selectedIndex=4&c05d-selectedIndex=2&76e1-selectedIndex=0&5854-selectedIndex=0&a56e-selectedIndex=0&67df-selectedIndex=0&ae18-selectedIndex=0&224e-selectedIndex=0&b2cd-selectedIndex=0&5869-selectedIndex=0>
- ²⁰ See note 19.
- ²¹ Ethiopia: J W van Fleet, K Watkins and J Greubel, *Africa Learning Barometer*, 2012, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/africa-learning-barometer>
- ²² See note 19.
- ²³ India: ASER 2012 http://images2.asercentre.org/Funding/fund_raising_document_-_4_august_2012.pdf
- ²⁴ Save the Children, *Beyond school walls: a boost for readers*, 2013
- ²⁵ See note 23.
- ²⁶ See note 7.
- ²⁷ Unicef India. See, for example, 'Out of school children and dropout a national emergency: UNICEF', *The Hindu*, 13 April 2013, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/out-of-school-children-and-dropout-a-national-emergency-unicef/article4611287.ece>
- ²⁸ See note 4.
- ²⁹ See note 5.
- ³⁰ See note 3.
- ³¹ See note 3.

Save the Children works in more than 120 countries. We save children's lives. We fight for their rights. We help them achieve their potential.

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