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Access to and participation in education in South Africa: a quantitative analysis

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ABSTRACT

The right of access to education has been an issue of international concern for many decades. With the transition to democracy in South Africa, marked by the first democratic election in 1994, the right of access to education has also formed a cornerstone of South Africa's education policy. Access to nine years of basic education is guaranteed in terms of the South African Constitution. The right to further education is also entrenched in terms of the Constitution, although this is conditional on the state making this progressively available and accessible through reasonable measures.

By using actual 2001 population and school enrolment data, this research study measures access to schooling by using standard international indicators of access, namely gross and net enrolment ratios, age-specific enrolment rates, and apparent and net intake rates. The study compares such data with existing estimates by other organisations and analysts. It assesses the extent to which universal or full access to basic education has been achieved and how far South Africa has gone in making further education progressively available.

The study suggests that in-depth analysis of the data shows that access to education is not as widespread as other estimates have indicated. The net enrolment ratio in the basic or compulsory education phase is 89% and not 97% as estimated by the Department of Education. Some 13% of children of school-going age (or 1.55 million children) are not attending school.

The study found that universal access to basic education has not been achieved. There are problems with access to further education and South African learners' access to education is affected by provincial location. Provincial gross enrolment ratios range from 89% to 101% and net enrolment ratios range from 82% to 91%.

The study recommends that further research is required to identify the barriers that are preventing full access to education. It also recommends that future progress in terms

of access to education must continue to be monitored which means that good, accurate and consistent data must be made available.