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

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The right of all children in the world to an education has been an issue of international concern for many decades. This concern was articulated by the United Nations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (Article 26) (United Nations, 1948), where the right to education was entrenched as a human right, and again in 1959 in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1959), which called for access to free and compulsory education for all, 'at least in the elementary stages' (Principle 7).

For many developing countries, providing all their children with access to at least a certain level of education has been an important but difficult to achieve development priority. Several regional and international conferences have been convened to develop plans and target dates for achieving universal primary education (UPE) or some level of basic education. In the early 1960s a series of regional conferences convened by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) set 1980 as the year for achieving UPE in most African, Asian and Arab countries, and 1970 for countries in Latin America (Fredriksen, 1983, p.142). While education expansion over the following two decades took place at 'historically unprecedented rates'(Colclough & Lewin, 1993, p.14), a much higher than expected population growth in most countries made the task of expanding the schooling system much more difficult than had been forecast. After 1980, as a result of a worldwide recession, the rate of expansion was sharply reduced, especially as the recession spiralled into a debt crisis in developing countries.

In 1990, at the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand, which was convened by Unesco, the issue of educational access was emphasised and delegates pledged to provide basic education for all children by the end of the decade (Unesco, 2001). However, this deadline had to be extended to 2015 when the follow-up World Education Forum conference was held in 2000 in Dakar, Senegal, to review progress since 1990.

In South Africa, where historically education was designed to maintain white hegemony over Africans, coloureds and Indians, access to education was based on racial, class and geographical criteria. With the official introduction of apartheid policies after the National Party came into power in 1948, an education system which promoted separation between and differentiation of the different race and ethnic groups was established. Bantu education, introduced in 1953, was aimed at 'subjugating Africans psycho-ideologically to the designs of apartheid' (Fataar, 1997, p.340). For Africans in particular, but also for coloureds and Indians, education in this context was not seen as a human right but rather as a privilege.

South Africa was not represented at Unesco's regional conference for African countries held in Addis Ababa in 1961 (Colclough & Lewin, 1993, p.15) and was consequently not a signatory to the commitment to achieving UPE by 1980. Education was seen as a privilege for Africans and South Africa was not committed to achieving UPE for African learners (since unlike coloured, Indian and white children, education for Africans was not compulsory). However, school enrolment, particularly for Africans but also for coloured children, increased substantially during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (see table 19 in the Appendix). The nature, extent and provision of schooling in South Africa during this period were not motivated by the notion of education as a right. Rather they were 'driven by a complex interplay of political, economic and social factors' (Fataar, 1997, p.339). The policies of apartheid systematically promoted separate development for different ethnic groups by establishing homelands for each African ethnic group and separate residential areas (group areas) for the different race groups. The growth in both primary and secondary enrolment figures in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s was facilitated primarily by the development of the homelands and group areas 'in tandem with the separate development notions of grand apartheid' (Fataar, 1997, p.340), as well as by the need to achieve economic growth and political stability and meet the increasing demands for education by the African population.

During the transition to democracy, marked by the first democratic elections in 1994, the new democratically elected government inherited an education system where education coverage was already fairly extensive, although a fair proportion of the population was still excluded from school. In 1991 the gross enrolment ratio (GER)

(which measures the participation of learners of any age in education) was 97% (113% for primary and 71% for secondary schools), while the net enrolment ratios (NER) (which measures the participation of appropriately aged learners in education) was 92% in primary schools, 75% in junior secondary schools and 45% in senior secondary schools (Bot, 1997, p.7). Although the provision of education was fairly widespread, it was not provided in the most efficient way and did not translate into quality education. Approximately 30% of youth in schools were of the wrong age for their grade. Drop-outs and repetitions were high. Some 70% of learners, mainly African, were at school in homeland and rural areas – where the most disadvantaged schools were situated. An estimated 1.5 million to 2 million people, mostly in the homelands, who should have been in school, were not. Finally, achievement, as measured in terms of matric pass rate, was poor (Crouch & Mabogoane, 1997; Bot, 1997; Perry & Arends, 2004; Fataar, 1997).

With the transition to democracy the right of access to schooling has formed a cornerstone of South Africa's education policy and an integral part of the state's general commitment 'to redress imbalances generated through historical inequalities' (Department of Education, 1995). The right of access to education was constitutionally guaranteed. Section 29 of the Constitution (Republic of South Africa 1993) states that:

> Everyone has the right –
> (1) to basic education, including adult basic education; and
> (2) to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.

The South African Schools Act (SASA) (Republic of South Africa, 1996), which promotes access, quality and democratic governance in the schooling system, entrenches the constitutional right to basic education as a legal right. SASA defines basic education as nine years of schooling and makes schooling compulsory for learners from the beginning of the year they turn 7 years old to the end of the year they turn 15 years old or up to the ninth grade, whichever occurs first. Nine years of compulsory schooling includes all seven years of primary schooling and two of the five years of secondary schooling. The remaining three years of secondary schooling

form part of 'further education'. These years are not compulsory and while, according to the Constitution, everyone has the right to further education, this will only be made available and accessible in a progressive fashion by the state.

Has a constitutional commitment to the right to education and the enabling policies and regulations resulted in South Africa achieving universal access to education? The aim of this study is to evaluate whether or not South Africa has fulfilled its constitutional obligation to provide access to basic education for all and how far it has gone in making further education and training ´progressively available'. It also attempts to find out if South Africa is fulfilling its obligation equitably for all provinces, for all children of school-going age and for both male and female children.

In assessing the extent to which universal or full access is being achieved, the research study defines what is meant by universal access to education and reviews the positions of different analysts and role players on the extent to which access has been achieved and the reasons proffered by them for the circumstances they describe. Then, by using the most recent actual enrolment and population data that are both available for the same year, namely 2001, the report will undertake a comprehensive quantitative analysis of access to, and participation in, schooling. This will be done by applying the standard international indicators that are used to measure access and participation in school, namely gross and net enrolment ratios, age-specific enrolment rates, and apparent and net intake rates. Finally the report will suggest areas for further consideration.

Throughout this report different levels of school are referred to. Primary school refers to grades 1 to 7, compulsory or basic education refers to grades 1 to 9, and secondary education refers to grades 8 to 12. The appropriate age for enrolment in school is 7 to 18 years. The appropriate primary school age range is 7 to 13 years, the compulsory school age range is 7 to 15 years, and the secondary school age range is 14 to 18 years.