

Why is education important? We will hear a lot of facts and figures today – but I want to start by asking you to use your imagination.

You have heard these moving testimonies from these determined children who have travelled thousands of miles to be here. Now I want you to think of your own children. Imagine if they had had to endure the same hardships.

What if your child had never been to school? What if they had to work instead? How different would their future be? What would the rest of their life be like?

What if they were living in a country with no social security systems, no safety net. The impact of not having an education is even greater.

Unfortunately the stories we have heard today are not unique –there are 80 million children of primary school age who face the same problems everyday – children who are not in school.

Let me put this number in context - this is more than the entire primary school population of Belgium, the rest of the European Union and the United States of America combined. Right now, in the 21st century, 80 million are facing a lifetime of illiteracy and poverty. This must change.

Education is not only crucial in its own right – it is also vital in so many other areas.

It is vital for your health - it is proven that if a child completes primary school their chances of catching HIV/AIDS falls by half.

It is vital for escaping poverty – if a child completes primary school they will earn twice as much.

It is even vital for the life expectancy of your children – if a girl completes primary school the chances of her children living to the age of 5 increases by 50%.

And the impact is not just on individuals – universal education has a huge benefit for society.

If everyone in the country gets an education it improves governance and accountability, it helps fight corruption and it can even help strengthen democracy.

Conversely, if over 80% of women in countries like Niger can't read or write, what chance do we ever have of challenging the fundamental gender inequalities in society.

Education is crucial to end poverty. That is why 2 out of the 8 Millennium Development Goals were agreed on education. And that is why if we do not keep our promises on these education goals then we will miss all of the others.

So we know that education for all is a crucial issue.

But we also know how to solve it.

Where the money has been provided we have been able to get children in school, we have been able to recruit the professional teachers needed, we have been able to reduce class sizes and improve the quality of education.

The problem is that we have not seen the donors deliver the money to give their own promises a chance of being kept.

All we need is \$16 billion to achieve the full Education for All agenda, including early childhood and adult education. To put that figure in context it is the same as 5 days global military spending.

In fact it is so affordable, most countries could pay their fair share of the money needed for Education for All within their current planned aid increases.

There is even a globally agreed framework in which to deliver aid to education, the Fast Track Initiative, a framework which remains chronically underfunded.

When you understand the crucial role education can play and what it costs - the lack of action on universal education is incomprehensible.

Since the last education donor meeting, 5 years ago, over 50 million children have become adults without getting an education. How many more will miss out before we act?

This time it must change – we need to see your resources not your rhetoric. We need you to use your chequebooks not your notebooks.

You could make a real piece of history today, you could finally provide the money that will mean no-one in the world is denied an education.

The GCE calls on you to keep your promises.

The future of millions and millions of children is at stake.

Do not fail them.