

Chapter 5

MDG 2: Universal Education

Education is a key element in development and an integral component of the UNDP Human Development Index. The goal of widening access to education among children – the second pillar of the MDGs – is necessary for social and economic development.

This MDG has one target and three indicators. The indicators used here provide measures of enrolment in primary school and completion of attendance, plus literacy rates for 15–24-year-olds. However many other aspects of education are not assessed; nor is the availability of ‘free’ education included within the MDG system.

Goal 2. Achieving universal primary education

Target 2A: *Ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling*

Indicators:

- 2.1 Net enrolment ratio in primary education
- 2.2 Proportion of pupils starting Grade 1 who reach last grade of primary
- 2.3 Literacy rate of 15–24 year-olds, women and men

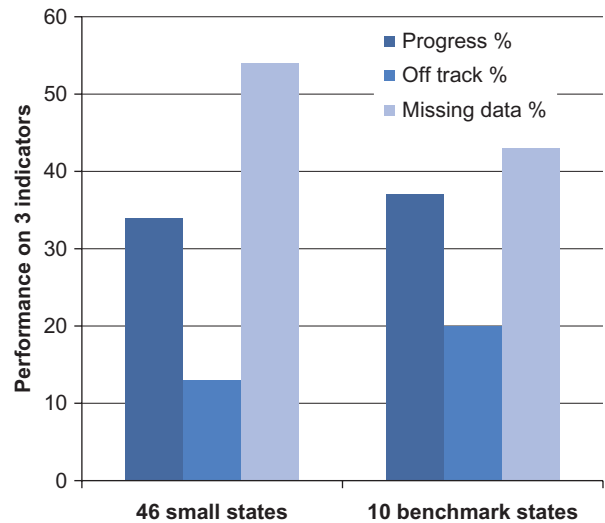
Indicators 2.1 and 2.2 are measures of primary school attendance. Indicator 2.3 is an outcome measure of literacy in young adults. All three indicators are assessed against a universal 100 per cent target, which is the same for each country and not a target arithmetically derived for each country separately from their 1990 baseline figure.

5.1 Overall performance

The 46 small states were outperformed by the 10 benchmark states on MDG 2 (see Figure 5.1). Details of the performance of the 56 states are shown in Annex 1. Only one of the 46 small states had achieved any of the MDG 2 indicators by 2007.¹

The progress of each of the 46 small states has been assessed against each of the three indicators (making

Figure 5.1 Performance on MDG 2: Education



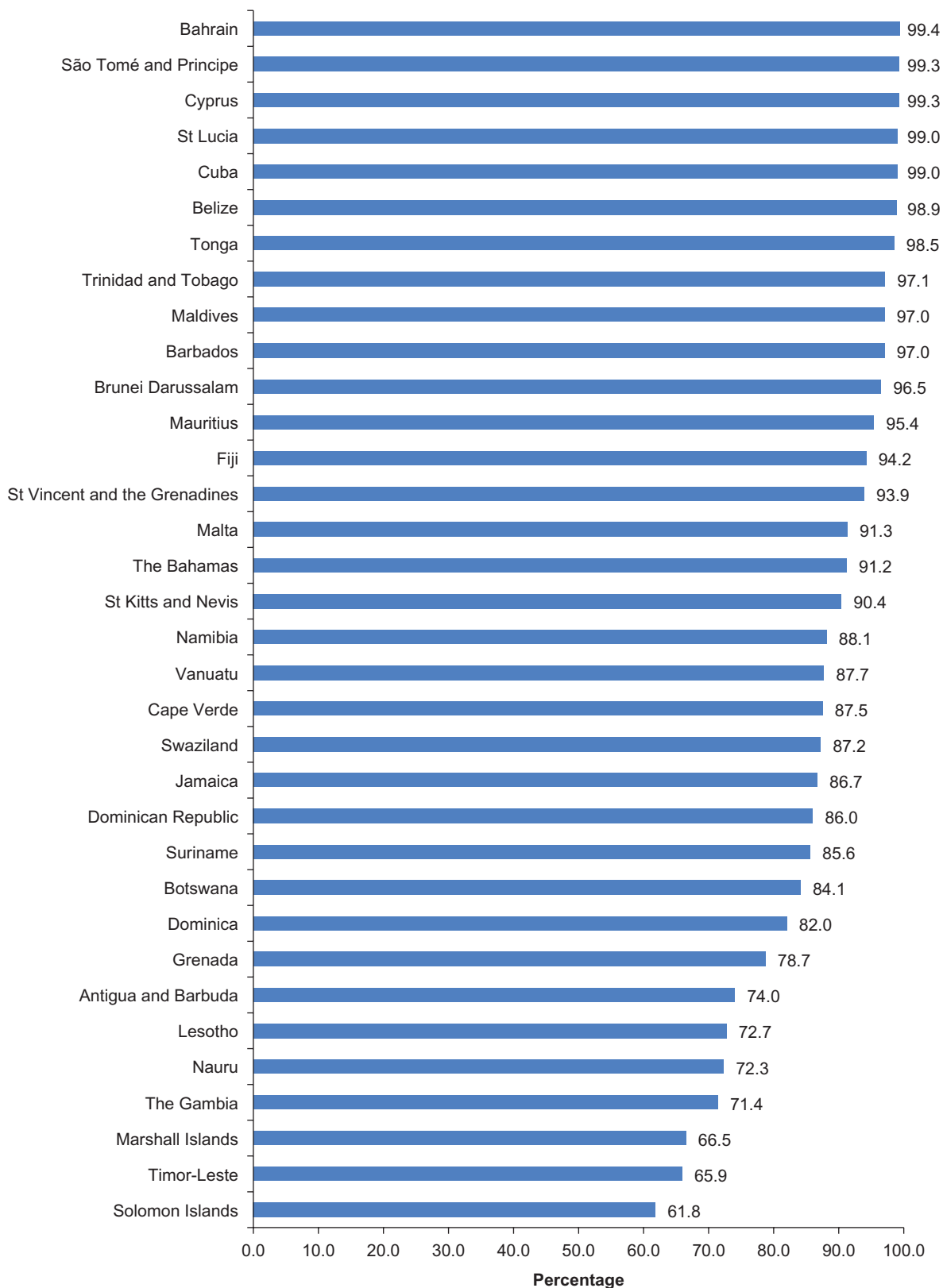
Source: UN MDG database 2010

a total of $46 \times 3 = 138$ assessments). Of the 138 assessments, progress was made in 46 (33%) of cases. In 18 (13%) of cases the small states were off-track. Missing data inhibited assessment of progress in 74 (54%) of cases.

None of the benchmark states reported achieving any of the targets for MDG 2. Missing data were substantial in all groups, ranging from 25 per cent in the BRIC states and 43 per cent in the other large states, with 52 per cent overall for the 10 benchmark states, compared with 54 per cent for the 46 small states.

Including missing data, the 46 small states made 33 per cent progress with this MDG, compared with 37 per cent progress by the benchmark states. Within this benchmark group the two island states (Iceland and New Zealand) made zero progress. The three large benchmark states (USA, UK and France) made 22 per cent progress, the BRIC states 67 per cent progress and South Africa 33 per cent progress. Thus the emerging BRIC states reported twice the level of progress of the 46 small states in achieving the goal of universal primary education.

A detailed review of the performance of states under each of the three indicators selected in MDG 2 is set out below.

Figure 5.2 Net enrolment ratio in primary education of both sexes

Note: Latest data were for 2007; where these were not available, data for 2006 or 2005 were used.

Source: UN MDG database 2010

5.2 Target 2A: Ensure boys and girls complete primary schooling

5.2.1 Indicator 2.1: Net enrolment in primary education

Including missing data, none of the 46 small states achieved 100 per cent enrolment in primary education by 2007, but progress was made by 18 (39%) of them, with 11 (24%) off-track. In 17 (37%) of cases missing data inhibited assessment of progress.

Eleven (24%) of the 46 small states were off-track on the target of achieving universal primary education enrolment, including Botswana, Dominica and Grenada, whose levels of enrolment fell below 85 per cent, as well as Marshall Islands, where enrolment in primary education fell from 88 per cent in 1990 to 67 per cent in 2007.

In seven other cases, the off-track status resulted from a decline in enrolment from over 90 per cent to a level above 85 per cent. These countries were Fiji (declined from 99 to 94 per cent), Jamaica (declined from 97 to 87 per cent), Maldives (declined from 98 to 97 per cent), Malta (declined from 97 to 91 per

cent), Vanuatu (declined from 92 to 88 per cent), Cape Verde (declined from 92 to 88 per cent and Suriname (declined from 92 to 86 per cent).

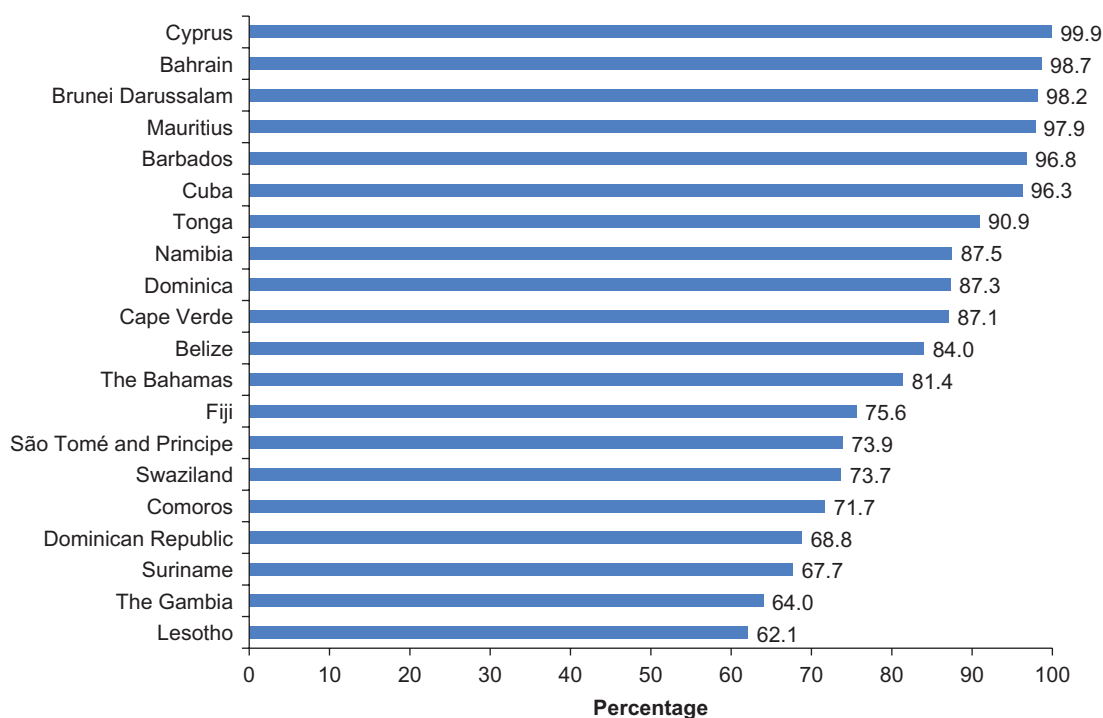
Proximity to target

The assessment of progress against the target of 100 per cent gives a partial and sometimes misleading picture of the range of performance. Proximity to target provides another view.

For example, overall the 46 selected small island states included 14 (30%) with enrolment in primary education above 95 per cent; in a further 17 states (37%) enrolment was between 75 and 94 per cent; in 10 states (22%) enrolment was below 75 per cent; in five cases (11%) no levels were recorded.

The lowest levels reported for the latest year (2005–2007) were for Antigua (74%), The Gambia (71%), Lesotho (73%), Nauru (72%), Marshall Islands (67%) and Solomon Islands (62%). The lowest levels reported from the 46 small states were for Guinea-Bissau (40%) and Haiti (22%); these levels were recorded for 1990, but there have been no further reports since then.

Figure 5.3 Percentage of pupils who reach last grade of primary education, both sexes



Note: Latest data were for 2007; where these were not available, data for 2006, 2005 or 2004 were used.

Source: UN MDG database 2010

The focus of support for improving primary education enrolment should not necessarily be on those countries that were off-track, which in some cases showed a marginal decline from a high level of achievement, but on those with countries with low levels of achievement.

5.2.2 Indicator 2.2: Percentage of pupils starting Grade 1

Including missing data, of the 46 small states, eight (17%) were on-track; five (11%) were off-track; and for 33 (72%) missing data inhibited assessment of progress.

Three of the small states were off-track in their pursuit of the target for pupils reaching the last grade in primary school: Fiji, The Gambia and Mauritius. In the case of Mauritius, while the 2007 value reported was 98 per cent, this was only marginally below the 1990 value of 99 per cent. In interpreting progress for this indicator, it is important to examine proximity to target.

Proximity to target

The measure of proximity to target throws a fresh light on achievement on this indicator. Of the 46

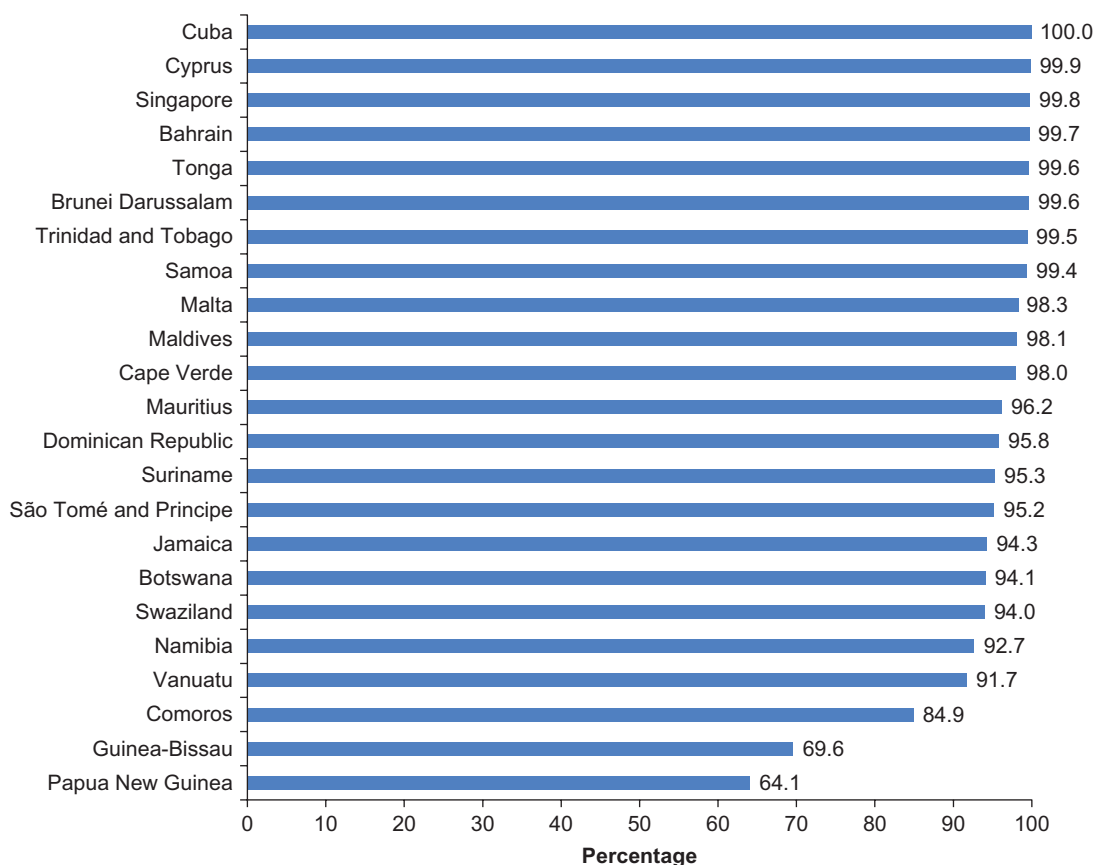
small states eight (17%) reported that at least 95 per cent of pupils reached the last grade. Eleven (24%) recorded that 75 per cent to 94 per cent reached the last grade, and ten (22%) reported less than 75 per cent. In 17 states (37%), missing data inhibited assessment of performance.

The lowest levels reported in reaching the final grade of primary school were in Lesotho (62%), The Gambia (64%), St Vincent and the Grenadines (64%), Suriname (68%), Dominican Republic (69%) and Swaziland (74%). Lesotho and Swaziland, however, despite their comparatively low levels of primary education completion, achieved marked progress on 1990 – up from 58 per cent and 64 per cent respectively.

On this indicator there was a substantial difference between the performance of the 32 CSS and the 14 non-Commonwealth SIDS. The CSS had a higher proportion of states (47%) with 75 per cent or more pupils reaching the last grade of primary school, compared with the other SIDS, which had only 21 per cent at this level.

The benchmark states, however, outperformed the 46 small states, with 70 per cent of countries reaching

Figure 5.4 Literacy rates of 15–24-year-olds, both sexes



Note: Latest data were for 2007; where these were not available, data for 2006 or 2005 were used.

Source: UN MDG database 2010

75 per cent or more primary education, completion compared with the CSS and the other 14 SIDS on 47 per cent and 21 per cent respectively. Two of the benchmark states had primary completion rates below 75 per cent: India (66%) and South Africa with (57%). Remarkably, despite its benchmark status, South Africa had the lowest level of primary school completion among the 56 states.

5.2.3 Indicator 2.3: Literacy rates for 15–24-year-olds

Cuba was the only one of the 46 small states that reported achieving 100 per cent literacy among 15–24-year-olds. Nineteen other countries (41%) were on-track in 2007 and two (4%) were off-track; in 24 countries (52%) missing data inhibited assessment of performance.

The two off-track states were Maldives, which declined from 99.2 per cent literacy in 1990 to 98.1 per cent in 2007, and Papua New Guinea, where literacy declined from 67 per cent in 1990 to 64 per cent in 2007.

Proximity to target

With this indicator it is again evident that the off-track classification can be misleading in terms of

relative status. Proximity to target is a more helpful supplementary measurement.

Overall, 16 of the 46 small states (35%) reported literacy rates of 95 per cent or above. Seven (15%) recorded rates of 75 per cent to 94 per cent and two (4%) reported rates below 75 per cent (Guinea-Bissau at 70 per cent and Papua New Guinea at 64 per cent). Twenty-one countries (47%) reported missing data. None of the benchmark states reported a literacy rate below 80 per cent.

5.3 Action on MDG 2: Education

National budget statements in response to the global financial crisis have paid special attention to education as a vital element in economic recovery. Fresh spending commitments have included priority for improved pre-school and primary education services in Jamaica; special priority for education in Seychelles; and the setting up of an education commission in St Lucia. However, these education activities are not explicitly linked to the pursuit of MDG targets and these countries are not among the worst performing.

Note

- 1 On target 2.3, Cuba reported 100 per cent literacy for 15 to 24 year-olds.