

**Joanna Härmä, *Low-fee Private Schooling and Poverty in Developing Countries*  
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Book Excerpt 5

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There can be little doubt now, although some commentators do remain unconvinced, that private, low-fee-paying provision has grown up in response to failing government systems (Chudgar & Quin, 2012; Härmä, 2009, 2013a; Kingdon, 2007; Morgan, Petrosino, & Fronius, 2014; Nishimura & Yamano, 2013; Rose, 2002; Srivastava, 2006; Tooley & Dixon, 2006). Through the drive for Education for All, starting in the 1990s in the post-Jomtien era, many education systems were pushed to expand and abolish school fees, at a pace that was unsustainable. This came even after previous attempts to abolish fees in countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and Tanzania failed in earlier times, due to difficulties of resourcing and ensuring sufficient supply of school places (Fredriksen, 2009b; Nishimura & Byamugisha, 2011). The intentions behind these internationally coordinated drives was undoubtedly good: the position of the movement is that no child's potential should be wasted due to their parents' inability to pay for education, because education is a human right (Aubry & Dorsi, 2016; Moumne & Saudemont, 2015; Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). The previous pattern of expansion of schooling systems and growing enrolment levels in schools was not fast enough to serve equity considerations, while in the case of Sub-Saharan Africa, enrolments rose substantially but then declined due to economic crises. The existence of the fee barrier meant that a very large proportion of children in many countries would never be able to access education, and these children would be the most disadvantaged, and would, with the lack of education, remain the most disadvantaged.

However, the teachers, the infrastructure and the teaching-learning materials needed to serve these disadvantaged children coming to school for the first time were not in place when the gates were thrown open. There was no funding to supply these, and there were not even enough educated people in many countries to become good teachers, which was clearly documented in writing from the immediate post-colonial period: concerns regarding the supply of good teachers, or candidates to become good teachers being expressed as early as 1965 with regard to Kenya, to take just one example (Hansen, 1965; Indire & Hanson, 1971). What resulted from the Education for All movement was an enormous growth in enrolment and, to a lesser extent, attendance, although this amounted to little more than just 'bums on seats' – while over-stretched systems were not able to maintain the quality of what had been going on in schools (ActionAid, 2003; Rose, 2002; Save the Children UK, 2004; Winkler & Sondergaard, 2008). It is also worth noting that there were, in many cases, already serious quality concerns even before fee abolitions took place (Fredriksen, 2009). Before, the poor were being left behind through the unaffordability and physical inaccessibility of education in government schools whose task was made that much easier through the limitation imposed on the number students, and through those gaining access being better-resourced and supported at home. Now, the poor are failed through their access to schools that are not equipped to teach poor children in the large numbers required. The scale of the issue in some places cannot be over-stated: India's school system has been put under great

strain (Chudgar & Quin, 2012) due to the country's enormous population. While some places may have achieved equity in access, the question can legitimately be raised – what is this equitable access worth?...

Before the 1990s education was a 'poor relation' in the world of international development. There were other priorities, such as economic, agricultural and infrastructural development, seen as crucial for helping 'developing countries' recover from their painful experiences of colonization, and 'develop'. In addition, the 1980s saw poorer countries ravaged by the first major debt crisis. By 1990 the importance of educating citizens of all countries was at last recognized on the international stage, although many countries had already been working to increase access to education ever since Independence. Efforts were crystalized in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, at the World Conference on Education for All, where key education goals were agreed upon, to be achieved by the turn of the Millennium in 2000. The meeting resulted in the World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs, kicking off what became known in education circles as the Education for All era.

But the goals established in 1990 were not met; and in Dakar in 2000 the international community met again at the World Education Forum. The Dakar Framework for Action set out the six EFA goals, starting with early childhood care and education, up through youth getting the education and skills they need for the world of work or further education, and also tackling adult literacy. The final goals stipulated that education and schooling should be non-discriminatory with regard to girls and women, and must be of good quality. EFA should have been achieved by 2015, but once again was not; with many countries very far from the target, many not even achieving the most basic goal of universalizing access to primary school (UNESCO, 2015)....