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The distribution of educational opportunity plays a key role in shaping human development prospects. Within countries, governments and people increasingly recognize that unequal opportunities for education are linked to inequalities in income, health and wider life chances. And what is true within countries is true also between countries. Large global gaps in education reinforce the extreme divides between rich and poor nations in income, health and other aspects of human development.

The full extent of the gulf in opportunities for education is not widely appreciated. Education is a universal human right. However, enjoyment of that right is heavily conditioned by birth and inherited circumstance. Access to education is greatly influenced by where one is born and by other factors over which children have no control, including parental income and nationality.

From a global perspective, being born in a developing country is a strong indicator for reduced opportunity. (1)School achievement, measured in terms of the average number of years or grade reached in education, is one (admittedly limited) measure of global inequality. While almost all member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have attained universal school achievement to grade 9, most countries in developing regions are far from this position. At age 16, over 80% of the population of the OECD countries is in secondary school while one-quarter of sub-Saharan* Africa's population is still in primary school. Four years later, at age 20, around 30% of the OECD population is in post-secondary education. The figure for sub-Saharan Africa is 2%.

(2)Striking as they are, these figures tell only part of the story. One way of thinking about unequal opportunity is to consider the chance that a child born in one country will achieve a given level of education relative to a child born somewhere else. The results are revealing. (3)They show that children in countries such as Mali and Mozambique have less chance of completing primary school than children in France or the United Kingdom have of reaching higher education. The gulf in attainment is not restricted to sub-Saharan Africa. Around one in five pupils entering primary school in Latin America and in South and West Asia does not survive to the last primary grade.

Global inequalities in education mirror inequalities in income. The association is not coincidental. While the relationship between education and wealth creation is complex, knowledge has an important influence on economic growth and productivity. In an increasingly knowledge-based international economy, differences in educational opportunities are taking on

more importance. There is a growing sense in which today's inequalities in education can be seen as a predictor for tomorrow's inequalities in the global distribution of wealth, and in opportunities for health and employment. (4)The fact that in half the countries of sub-Saharan Africa the survival rate to the last grade of primary school is 67% or less is not irrelevant to prospects for overcoming the region's marginalization in the global economy.

From Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2009, UNESCO

*sub-Saharan サハラ以南の