

## ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

**Target:** Ensure that children everywhere boys and girls alike—complete a full course of primary education.

**Performance Summary:**  
 Will development goal be reached?  
**Possibly** – Probably – Unlikely – Lack of Data  
 State of supportive environment:  
**Strong** – Fair – Weak but improving - Weak

### Status and Trends

#### Enrolment Rate

In 1919, Bahrain was the first country in the Arabian Gulf to establish a public school. Since then, education has been a high priority for the government and great strides in this area have been made in the succeeding decades. Today, schools are free and accessible to all, Bahrainis and non-Bahrainis, and although, education is not compulsory, it is highly encouraged by the government. By 2001/2002 Bahrain had already achieved 100 per cent net enrolment rate in the primary school, 88.1 per cent in the intermediate and 73.4 percent in secondary level, Table (1). The last two rates are slightly higher (89.7 and 74.5 percent respectively) if non-Bahraini population is excluded.

On the other hand, the drop-out rates continue to decrease while enrollment rates continue to increase.

Table (1)  
Net enrolment rate by level of education

Level	Rate	
	1990-91	2001-02
Primary	85.9	100.0
Intermediate	79.0	88.1
Secondary	57.6	73.4

Source: Ministry of Education

#### Literacy 15-24

Literacy data follows a similar trajectory as school enrolments, increasing in the last decade to almost 100 per cent for 15 to 24 year olds. This finding is entirely consistent with intermediate and secondary school enrolments which are already very close to 100 per cent. Likewise, university education showed significant gains. For example, enrolment in the University of Bahrain, the national university, increased from 5,359 students in 1990-91 to 19,000 students in 2001-02, an increase of three and half folds.

#### Public Expenditure on Education as a Percentage of GNP

Government expenditure on education accounts

in part, for the success of Bahrain’s educational system. In the 1990s, for instance, investment in education ranged between 3 to 4 per cent of GNP (not including university education), the most recent figure for 2001 being 3.3 per cent, a figure which compares favorably with many developed countries.

In addition, the amount allocated to each student has increased over time as reflected in the index of per capita expenditure shown in Table (2).

Table (2)  
Index (1991=100) of GDP per capita expenditure on education

Years	Index
1991	100
1995	104.4
2001	125.6

Source: Ministry of Education

### Challenges to Achieving the Goal

The main challenge facing the government of Bahrain in the area of education is how to bring the content of the educational system to the 21<sup>st</sup> century standard. One way is to refocus on applied science and technologies in order to meet the needs of national and international labor markets that are increasingly driven by high-content knowledge economies, and to move away from root-memorization method of teaching to a more communicative participatory approach.

Currently, and like many other countries, Bahrain finds itself unable to absorb the growing number of school and university graduates in the local labor market, who are also not well-equipped to compete in the international labor market. On the other hand, authorities come under an increasing pressure to invest more resources into the education system, not only to accommodate an increasing number of enrolled children, but also to give more people the opportunity to higher education.

*By 2001 Bahrain had already achieved 100 percent net enrolment rate in the primary school.*

*“Education is compulsory and free in the early stages as specified and provided by law. The necessary plan to combat illiteracy is laid down by law.”*

*Art 7, Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain*

## Supportive Environment

As a member of the global UN Education for All (EFA) since 1990, Bahrain has made special efforts to incorporate and achieve the designed targets as part of the National Action Plan, as required by EFA. The plan includes mechanisms to improve the quality of education so that graduates are adequately prepared for the job market. Further measures, however, have to be taken in order to avoid a growing population of dissatisfied educated young people.

Furthermore, the constitution of the Kingdom lays emphasis on providing all school age children with free education, regardless of gender or nationality. Within this context, the government has been considering the human resources as the fundamental element in achieving the overall national goals of social and economic development and as a consequence, it has used all available means to maintain education as a high priority, while at the same time improving its quality.

## Priorities for Development Assistance

The government of Bahrain is in agreement that international development assistance needs to focus on:

- Supporting the Ministry of Education in enhancing the quality of education through introducing proper mechanisms that integrate the views of the community, the business sector, and all others who are concern with education process. In addition to revising the contents of national syllabuses, the main aim is to equip young people with the kind of skills and conceptual capacities that make them relevant for the increasingly complex and intellectual base economies of the modern world.
- Enhancing the policy planning mechanism at the Ministry of Education, with regard to the implications of socio-economic changes and globalization on the education system of Bahrain.
- Strengthening the mechanisms of coordination and communication among various institutions and units, which are part of the education system.

*According to the UN EFA, Bahrain concentrates on the improvement of the quality of education so that graduates are well-prepared for the job market*