

# *Education for All – Fast Track Initiative*

**Accelerating progress towards quality universal primary education**

## **Press Release**

**For immediate release**

### **Low-income countries receive US\$ 265 million to send millions of children to primary school**

*Donors meeting of the Education for All - Fast Track Initiative in Bonn supports basic education plans of seven developing countries*

*Bonn, 24 May 2007* - Seven low-income countries, of which five are in Sub-Saharan Africa, received financial and political support for their plans to send millions of children to school. Under the Education for All - Fast Track Initiative the national education plans of Benin, Cambodia, Mali, Mauritania, Mongolia, Mozambique and Sierra Leone were endorsed with a financial plan totaling US\$ 265 million in grants.

No country seriously committed to Education for All will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by lack of resources – was a firm promise that was made at the 2000 World Education forum in Dakar, Senegal. In reality, not all developing countries with sound education plans are able to attract the additional financing they need. The Catalytic Fund of the Education for All - Fast Track Initiative (FTI) was founded just for this purpose: countries with FTI endorsed national education plans can draw upon this fund to jump-start their education investments. The Catalytic Fund, with expanded eligibility and sponsored by The Netherlands, United Kingdom, the European Commission, Ireland, Spain, France, Denmark, Germany, Russia and Belgium allocated today an impressive US\$ 265 million for education sector plans in the seven developing countries. "These education plans show very clearly the firm commitment of developing countries to educate their nation's children", says Desmond Bermingham, head of the FTI secretariat. "Some of these countries are extremely poor, but still they manage to dedicate 20% of their scarce domestic resources to education purposes."

The support for the seven national education plans comes on the heels of the High-Level Education Conference in Brussels on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May hosted by the European Commission. During this event, new commitments were made by donors for more, better, faster and longer-term aid for education. Besides aid commitments from rich country donors, the High-Level Conference in Brussels was enriched by the active participation of the private sector and foundations which have not previously participated in these events, such as the Soros and the Hewlett foundations.

The Millennium Development Goal of getting all the world's children into school before 2015 is within reach and great progress has been made. "Expanding access to education is one of the success stories in development", says Manfred Konukiewitz, deputy director-general of the German Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation

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and host of the Fast Track Initiative donors meeting being organized this week in Bonn. In the past five years alone, around 23 million children worldwide – who previously had no access to education - have enrolled into primary school. The share of children completing primary school has risen to 79 % in 2005 from 69 % in 1995. Six Sub-Saharan African countries have increased primary completion by over 10 percent a year since 2000. These figures point to the important progress that has been made in the most challenging countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, there are still 77 million children who are out of school today – including 44 million girls. It is estimated that US\$ 9 billion in external aid is needed per annum in order to achieve the goal of universal primary education. This would require almost a tripling in aid for basic education in low income countries over the next 2 - 3 years.

The Education for All - Fast Track Initiative, which was established in 2002, has been widely welcomed as an important initiative to help increase the levels of financing for basic education in poor countries. It is also helping to ensure that all financing – both domestic and external – is used effectively to help countries achieve long term and lasting improvements in their education systems. The FTI has contributed to major progress in the past few years. In Yemen, a country where girls traditionally lagged far behind boys in school attendance, there has been a sharp increase in intake rates (from 78% in 2000 to 117% in 2005). In Kenya, an initial US\$ 24.2 million grant from the FTI Catalytic Fund has helped the schools to purchase textbooks in time for the start of the school year. In Niger, an additional 1 million children are going to primary school thanks to the endorsement and additional financing through FTI.

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*The FTI is a global partnership supported by over 30 major bilateral and multilateral agencies working in the education sector. The FTI Donor Technical Meeting, which is being held in Bonn through the 25<sup>th</sup> of May, is bringing together 16 donor countries and the European Commission, four international organizations including the World Bank, Unicef, Unesco, Asian Development Bank, civil society representatives (Global Campaign for Education) and many developing country experts. As per mid-2007, 31 developing countries have been endorsed by the Fast Track Initiative with 15 additional countries awaiting FTI endorsement still this year.*

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