

PRESS RELEASE

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52 percent more children in school in African countries supported by the Education for All Fast Track Initiative

The Education for All Fast Track Initiative (EFA FTI) allocated US\$ 233 million to low-income countries in support of their education goals and announced that 15.2 million more children enrolled into primary school in African FTI countries between 2000 and 2006.

Oslo, 15 December 2008 – The Education for All Fast Track Initiative (EFA FTI) announced last weekend that US\$ 233 million will be granted to Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, The Gambia, Timor Leste and Zambia to support their programs to reach universal primary education.

The grants will come from FTI's Catalytic Fund, a multilateral fund sponsored by 17 donor countries. It helps low-income countries that have sound and credible national education strategies to jump-start their education investments¹.

According to the EFA FTI Annual Report 2008 launched today in Oslo, there has been tremendous progress in Sub-Saharan African countries: overall enrollment numbers – the number children enrolled into primary school, regardless of age – are up by 36 percent. In FTI countries in Africa there is a 52 percent growth in enrollment (from 29.5 million children in 2000 to 44 million children enrolled in 2006), compared to a 23 percent increase in non-FTI countries. The report titled “The Road to 2015: Reaching the education goals” notes that a large majority of the 36 FTI countries have met an important target of getting almost all children into the first grade of primary school by 2010 – a vital step towards the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education by 2015.

“It is significant progress towards a ‘Vibrant Africa’. Education is the basis for engendering self-reliance and development”, says Shinichi Asazuma, senior coordinator with Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “The FTI support as compared to other global initiatives is more aligned with development countries’ processes and systems”, states John Nielsen, Head of Department with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Denmark and G8 president Japan are currently the co-chairs of the FTI Steering Committee.

EFA FTI currently supports 36 low-income countries around the world, including 22 in Sub-Saharan Africa. About half of the newly enrolled children (48%) were girls. 60% of the FTI countries already have an equal percentage of boys and girls enrolled in primary school or will achieve this objective within the next few years.

Within the Fast Track Initiative, progress has always been measured from the perspective of the primary school completion rate (PCR), the percentage of children entering the last grade of

¹ Norway’s financial commitment to EFA FTI totaled US\$ 112 million for the period 2004 – 2008. It will increase its contribution in 2009 by NOK 55 million (around US\$ 8 million) on top of the existing pledge.

primary school measured against the total number of children in that specific age range. At present rates, 27 FTI countries will achieve a PCR of 80% by 2015.

The Annual Report 2008 furthermore documents that a survey in 10 FTI countries found that the education sector scored better than other sectors in implementing policies that are believed to raise aid effectiveness.

„The FTI partnership has been praised by the international community as a good model for donor harmonization”, says Joy Phumaphi, the World Bank Vice-President for Human Development. “Early results show that the partnership has been effective in supporting countries to achieve ambitious education goals. In many countries the quality of learning is the next frontier”.

The report notes as well that the unprecedented gains in the education field of the past years are under threat. Due to the global food and economic crises, millions of people are pushed back into poverty and make painful choices not to send their children to school but to let them work and contribute to the household income. The FTI Secretariat expects that social protection programs linked to education, such as school feeding, will gain in importance.

“We must not let the financial crises undermine what we have achieved so far, but deliver on our commitments”, says Mr. Erik Solheim, Norway’s Minister of Environment and International Development. “Children living in fragile countries are vulnerable and difficult to reach, but it’s important that we give them special attention. Especially girls must be included in our common efforts if we are to succeed in giving education for all.”

The total number of out-of-school children around the world dropped from 103 million in 1999 to 75 million in 2006 (UNESCO, 2008). Most of the 75 million children out of school today are hard to reach: girls, Aids orphans, children living in remote regions or belonging to ethnic minorities and children with disabilities. There is a special case for children in (post-)conflict countries where almost half of the out-of-school children live. The FTI recognizes the pressing need to ensure access to quality education for all vulnerable groups. The partners in FTI have proposed to address the urgent needs of fragile states by a UNICEF-led Education Transition Fund which will provide a rapid and flexible financing mechanism for education in (post-) conflict situations. The fund will operate in the broad FTI structure.

Many low-income countries, most of them in Sub-Saharan Africa, have expressed a strong interest in joining EFA FTI. The FTI hopes to endorse the national education plans of approximately 50 countries by 2010. As it continues its expansion, the financing gap for primary education is a growing concern. Additional financing for FTI’s Catalytic Fund (CF) is urgently needed. Currently, it has allocated all its funds and the overall financing gap of FTI countries amounts to US\$ 1 billion in 2009.

“Without education, people remain poor and are unable to take control of their own lives and help shape their communities”, according to Tisazu Asare, Head, Education Sector Planning of the Ethiopian Ministry of Education. “The FTI partnership has helped many countries to make great progress over the past five years. With the support of all international partners it now has the opportunity to truly deliver on the promise of universal primary education.”

The Annual Report 2008 can be downloaded from the website: www.education-fast-track.org

The Education for All (EFA) Fast Track Initiative (FTI) was launched in 2002 as a global partnership between developing countries, donor countries and multilateral organizations including the World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO to ensure accelerated progress towards the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education by 2015. All low-income countries that demonstrate a serious commitment towards achieving the education MDG can receive support from FTI. The EFA FTI Secretariat is hosted by the World Bank.
