

## News Release

**Contact:** Michael McDowell, Email [mmcdowell1@educationfasttrack.org](mailto:mmcdowell1@educationfasttrack.org) tel 202-473-7776 or 202-468-1517  
Angela Bekkers, Email: [abekkers@educationfasttrack.org](mailto:abekkers@educationfasttrack.org); tel 202-458-8831

### **International Women’s Day: new report highlights progress in girls’ education, while warning of waning political attention**

*Washington, D.C., Thursday, March 3, 2011-* To celebrate the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day in March, the Education For All Fast – Fast Track Initiative (EFA FTI), an international partnership dedicated to ensuring quality basic education for all children, launches a new report to highlight the fundamental importance of *girls'* education for economic and social development of individuals, families, and nations.

***Fast-tracking Girls’ Education***, released today, details the encouraging progress that girls have made in enrolling in school and, increasingly, completing their education. At the same time, the publication warns that in developing countries, too many girls are not in school, and many girls face continuing health risks, harassment, and danger just walking to class. The report also reviews the ‘girl-friendly’ policy interventions which built the foundation for this progress – illustrated by countries such as Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Yemen.

Carol Bellamy, Chair of EFA FTI, says: “Investment in girls' education makes simple economic sense. No country has ever emerged from poverty without giving priority to education. And if education is the escape door from poverty, then girls' education is the key to that door. On the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of International Women’s Day, I would like to stress that bolstering girls' education is not a question of charity, but of laying the foundation for a thriving economy and a just society.”

Today, 67 million children are not in school, more than half of them girls. “Education provides an excellent return on investment. Education for girls and young women provides the best return of all. But to realise full value for this investment, a young woman must remain in school through the end of her secondary education”, says Robert Prouty, Head of the EFA FTI Secretariat. A child born to a mother who can read, is 50 percent more likely to survive past age 5. In Africa’s poorest states, an estimated 1.8 million children’s lives could have been saved if their mothers had at least a secondary education. Robert Prouty adds: “Investment in education and health must be seen as complementary. The important investment made in the health sector in support of improved infant and maternal health aid, will not have the full impact without commensurate support for education, and if support for women’s health is eroded, investment in education will not lead to the expected results.”

The report has also been praised by Kevin Watkins, Director of UNESCO’s 2011 Global Monitoring Report: “No issue merits more urgent attention in education than the glaring divide that separates boys and girls in many of the world’s poorest countries. This compelling report provides a road map for the journey towards gender equity”.

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### **Fast facts about girls' education:**

- 19 million more children enrolled in school between 2002 and 2008 in over 40 developing countries supported by EFA FTI. 54% of those children were girls, proving that girls are at last catching up with boys.
- In African FTI countries, 62% of children entering school for the first time were girls.
- More than two thirds of girls completed the last grade of primary school in all FTI countries in 2008, compared to only 52 percent in 2000.
- Ethiopia: By applying an education sector plan with affirmative action towards girls, the country went from a girls' enrolment rate in primary education of 40% in 1999 to 92 percent in 2008.
- Burkina Faso: the government managed to change the label of girls' education from 'worrying' to 'progress' within a couple of years. The number of girls enrolled in school increased 73% between 2002 and 2008, and increasing numbers of girls are continuing onto secondary school.
- The most common intervention to support girls' education highlighted in the report is the mobilization of communities to send girls to school. Engaging with media and religious leaders helped to convince parents of the importance of girls' education.
- Targeted financial support for girls, to cover for school fees and textbook costs, was also important to keep girls in the classroom.
- The creation of school health and feeding programs was especially effective in preventing girls from dropping out.

*'Fast-Tracking Girls' Education, A Progress Report by the Education for All - Fast Track Initiative'* can be downloaded at [www.educationfasttrack.org](http://www.educationfasttrack.org)  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/educationforall](http://www.facebook.com/educationforall)