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**Round Table on Challenges
and Opportunities**

The Education for All – Fast-Track Initiative

By Fast-Track Initiative

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Education for All - Initiative for Accelerating Implementation

The Case for a Global Compact on Education

With 100 million children out of school, both developing and donor countries are challenged to dramatically step up their financial, political and technical assistance in order to achieve the 2015 Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education. Already by 2009 at the latest, all six-year-old children will need to be enrolled in school. In response to the immediacy of this challenge, FTI was launched in 2002 as a global partnership between donor and developing countries to ensure accelerated progress towards this goal. Today, all low-income countries can receive support from the FTI once they meet two requirements which demonstrate serious commitment to achieving universal primary completion: an approved PRSP or its equivalent and an education sector strategy consistent with the PRSP and endorsed in country by the local donors involved in education.

The Fast Track Initiative

FTI is built on mutual commitments. Partner countries agree to put primary education at the forefront of their domestic efforts and develop sound national education plans. Conversely, donors provide coordinated and increased financial and technical support in a transparent and predictable manner. By bringing donors, civil society and developing country governments together around the same goal, FTI is improving the effectiveness of aid by strengthening donor collaboration, alignment and harmonization. FTI is also evolving as a good model for the country driven implementation of an MDG linked global initiative. It provides a framework and a platform where the country and its donors come to an agreement that follows key principles agreed by the FTI partnership. These include adequate domestic budget allocation to education and increased efficiency in use of resources.

Two FTI Trust Funds

FTI is essentially country based. It has, however, also put in place two globally-managed trust funds. The Catalytic Fund provides short-term financing to countries with too few in country donors to help close their financing gap as they scale up their education plans. Today, the Catalytic Fund has a total of 9 donors with commitments totaling about US\$ 445 million over 2003-2007. To date, the Fund has disbursed US\$ 75 million to 9 countries. The Education Program Development Fund (EPDF) aims to provide upstream and downstream technical support for countries with weak capacity to develop or implement sound education strategies. The number of donors to the EPDF has grown from 2 to 5 over the past year with commitments totaling about US\$ 30 million for the period 2005-2007.

Resource Mobilization

The FTI has committed over US\$ 120 million direct support through the Catalytic Fund. More importantly, FTI appears to be having a positive impact on external financing for the low-income countries as a whole. Annual ODA to basic education in all low-income countries more than doubled from an average of \$1.24

billion from 1999 through 2002, when FTI was created, to an average of \$2.64 billion in 2003 and 2004. This represents some progress toward the annual minimum estimated US \$ 3.7 billion external financing required to support universal completion of quality primary education in low-income countries by 2015. However, estimates for all developing countries are between US\$ 5.6 billion and US\$ 10 billion annually of external donor financing to achieve universal primary education by 2015.

While this increase cannot be attributed solely to the influence of FTI, it is consistent with the increased international attention to basic education financing that FTI has stimulated, and demonstrates the feasibility of the FTI model of increasing overall resources flowing to the sector through a country-by-country approach rather than a single 'global fund'.

2006: The Fast Track Initiative is Expanding

The Fast Track Initiative has been moving forward and scaling up. Currently, 45 low-income countries are receiving financial or technical support from the FTI; 25 are benefiting from technical support through the Education Program Development Fund to help prepare or implement programs, and 20 are fully endorsed FTI partners. The number of countries participating as full partners will likely rise to over 40 in the next two years.

The 20 fully endorsed FTI partners are Burkina Faso, Djibouti, East Timor, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guyana, Honduras, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritania, Moldova, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Niger, Tajikistan, Vietnam, and Yemen. For the current 20 endorsed FTI countries alone, there is an estimated \$US 540 million funding gap for 2006.

After its launch nearly four years ago, and a little over 2 years of full implementation, the Fast Track Initiative now has a track record. The purpose of FTI has always been to expand and accelerate the entire EFA agenda. FTI has clearly added value in terms of additional resources flowing into endorsed countries, which have seen an average increase of 43 % in external financing for basic education within a year of joining FTI. Yet, much more needs to be done to fill the funding gap.

FTI has also been associated with consistent improvements in indicators for the endorsed countries. They are seeing better enrollment and completion rates, and far lower transaction costs as donors harmonize their procedures, conduct joint supervision missions, and agree jointly with governments on priority programs. Through the FTI, education has become the first sector to operationalize the Monterrey Consensus of more and better aid in exchange for better policies and domestic resource mobilization.

Many challenges remain. These include the need for long term, predictable financial support and for consistent attention to educational quality issues, including learning assessments, textbook distribution and quality, and the professional development of teachers.

It was with these challenges and opportunities in mind, that the Third Annual EFA-FTI Partnership meeting took place in Beijing, China, last November. The meeting

brought together more than 20 Education and Development Ministers, or their representatives, and officials from UN and multilateral agencies and several civil society organizations. Particular focus was on the challenges of expansion, management structures, and monitoring and accountability.

EFA-FTI THIRD ANNUAL PARTNERSHIP MEETING, BEIJING, CHINA

There was agreement that FTI country partners should strengthen their own domestic resource mobilization for primary education, and that Donor partners (particularly the G8 countries) should substantially increase their support for basic education through expanded country programs and through direct contributions to FTI.

It was agreed that the FTI Partnership should strengthen its capacity to provide long-term predictable financing by developing options to use the Catalytic Fund as a mechanism to provide predictable long term financing. The Netherlands will convene a task team to this end.

The Partnership welcomed the proposal from Brazil to engage newly industrialized countries in the Partnership to facilitate South-South learning and network building. UNESCO will take this discussion forward during the next meeting of the E-9 countries (Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan) to be held in Mexico later this month.

The Partnership also confirmed its determination to revisit the FTI goals and guiding principles with a view to include an explicit commitment to the gender equality goals and ensuring that the FTI promotes a consistent, holistic approach to gender; it was agreed that there remains a need to strengthen the focus on and support for addressing HIV/AIDS and for capacity enhancement.

It was agreed that the FTI Steering Committee would expand to include representatives of partner countries, civil society and of UNICEF in order to strengthen linkages between the work of UNGEI and the FTI. As follow up, the Minister of Education in Madagascar, the Chair person of the Global Campaign for Education, and the Chief of Education, UNICEF, have agreed to participate in the Steering Committee as of January 2006.

It was widely acknowledged that FTI has successfully transformed from a small pilot to a key part of the global architecture for dialogue and progress on EFA. It has demonstrated its ability to disburse required funds rapidly, with a focus on aid effectiveness. The coming year, as noted in Beijing, represents an opportunity to use these strengths, through expansion, to truly put EFA on the fast track. This will require the FTI to become a true policy platform for dialogue on accelerating EFA progress, working with a broader partnership to cover not just financial issues, but also such challenges as the need for reliable data on attendance and learning achievement, and a range of capacity building needs.

Other areas of value-added are less tangible and more difficult to measure, though perhaps of equal importance for the long-term prospects of achieving and maintaining the targets of the Millennium Development Goals. The FTI model is

based on reciprocal commitments among donors and partner countries, and seeks to achieve harmonization of donor procedures and policies. This approach is being universally applied in the growing number of countries seeking FTI endorsement, reducing the transaction costs to countries and shortening disbursement lags as indicated in the country examples above. There is evidence that this model is being applied increasingly in other low-income countries as well.

GROWING POLITICAL SUPPORT

In 2005, FTI continued to build its reputation as a key vehicle to maintain political support for EFA, to mobilize resources and to improve donor coordination, alignment and harmonization. Accordingly, it has received strong endorsement and support at the main international summits this past year, including the Group of Eight (G8) and UN summits.

At the G8 meeting in Gleneagles in 2005, the United Kingdom committed an additional US\$ 70 million to support the FTI. The G8 Communiqué called for donors to support the FTI stating:

“We will work to support the Education for All agenda in Africa, including continuing our support for the Fast Track Initiative (FTI) and our efforts to help FTI-endorsed countries to develop sustainable capacity and identify the resources necessary to pursue their sustainable educational strategies. Our aim is that every FTI-elected country will develop the capacity and have the resources necessary to implement their sustainable education strategies.”

In November 2005, at the fifth UNESCO High Level Group meeting on EFA held in Beijing, China, the resulting communiqué called for immediate and long-term financial support from EFA-FTI partners to developing countries, and asks that “*FTI be expanded as a means of mobilizing additional funds and technical assistance, as well as a forum for donor coordination and policy dialogue.*”

Additional commitments have been made. At the Beijing FTI meeting this past November, the US indicated that an additional US\$ 65 million for a select number of FTI endorsed countries would be made available in 2006. The European Commission has recently committed US\$ 76 million for the FTI Catalytic Fund.

In January 2006, the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer called on G8 finance ministers to pledge funding for universal education by the end of 2007. The Chancellor said he would use the February meeting of G8 finance ministers to press for the provision of free education in the world's poorest countries, saying that a pledge of US\$ 10 billion a year would ensure this target was met.

FTI HAS ALREADY DEMONSTRATED PROGRESS:

In **Nicaragua**, US\$ 3.5 million from the Fast Track Initiative enabled an improvement in teacher facilities and an increase in the number of children receiving a daily meal in school from 200,000 in 2004 to 400,000 in 2005. The latter intervention proved successful in increasing retention, which is one of the major goals of the country's EFA plan. In **the Gambia**, US\$ 4 million enabled the Government to purchase thousands of text books for grades 1-4 as well as offering staff quarters in

remote zones where communities were unable to provide housing for incoming teachers. In addition, the FTI funds helped test provision of modest allowances as incentives for teachers in remote areas; the pilot has proven successful, and the Government is now planning to include these allowances in its education budget in upcoming years. All of these have had an impact on the quality of education in poor rural areas. In **Yemen**, US\$ 10 million is being used to increase the quality of education and the enrollment of girls in rural areas, where only 30% attend school. Already, 14,000 teachers have been trained, 86 new schools are being built, and female teachers are being hired.

Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Ghana have collectively added one million children a year to their primary school enrollments since joining FTI in 2002-2003, which more than doubles the rate of increase in enrollment.

In terms of completion rates, progress has also been made across most of the first FTI endorsed countries, with an average 3% annual increase in completion rates. In **Niger** and **Guinea**, primary completion rates have increased 3 to 4 times faster than before 2002-2003, resulting in an additional 50,000 students completing their primary education every year.

While all of these developments are not directly attributable to FTI, the Partnership clearly has had a positive role. This is in part due to improving aid efficiency through better coordination and harmonization between governments and donors, as well as better monitoring mechanisms, and by showcasing a country's credibility. Moreover FTI has demonstrated its ability to disburse required funds rapidly upon endorsement of country plans.

In 2005, the Government of **Kenya** launched a new 5-year education sector investment program (KESPP) that was developed by the Kenya Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance working together with civil society and private sector organizations, local education experts, and supported by the local donor community. This collaborative process resulted in broad political support from both the Cabinet and Parliamentarians. The KESPP links Government and donor investment and is being used as a model for effective coordination of donors and United Nations agencies in a sector wide approach.

In order to speed up school access for primary age students, the Government made a request for support from FTI in July 2005, and received FTI endorsement in September. FTI moved quickly to ensure that the required funds were in country in time for the new school year. By January 2006, a grant of \$US 24.2 million was disbursed.

In **Madagascar**, following the invitation by the FTI co-chairs in December 2004 to join the Partnership, the Government updated its EFA plan originally prepared in 2003 and discussed it at a "Friends of Madagascar" conference in Paris. The revised plan was endorsed by the local donors in May 2005, following many consultations between the Government and local donors. The very process of obtaining endorsement helped accelerate donor/partner coordination and harmonization. FTI already serves as a unique reference for all the development partners in country and generally encourages the Education Ministry to reach out to

an expanded network of development partners in a transparent manner, including the local donors, to create a broad and holistic EFA plan.

FTI moved quickly to endorse the national education strategy, submitted to FTI in May 2005, and approved by the FTI donor partners one month later. The Government of Madagascar received a total of US\$ 6 million (out of US\$ 10 allocated) from the Catalytic Fund within two months, and will receive US\$ 25 million in 2006. Another allocation of US\$ 25 million for 2007 was approved by the Catalytic Fund Strategy Committee in Beijing. The local donors conducted the first of the semi-annual reviews of EFA implementation in November 2005; these reviews will also serve to monitor the use of the CF grant and to approve the release of the next tranche.

In **Mozambique**, the timing for the annual sector review has been changed so that it feeds into the Joint Donor Review. There is a Performance Assessment Framework for the sector and part of it is used for the broader Government's Performance Assessment Framework which includes all of the sectors. Currently, an indicator framework is being prepared for the second PRSP and the second Education Sector Strategic Plan. This year there has been a concerted effort by pooled fund signatories to indicate their commitments prior to the end of June 2005 in order to be included in the budget going to parliament. Similarly, other external funds were also captured for the first time in 2005 and this helped with the planning process for the 2006 budget.

DESPITE PROGRESS, KEY CHALLENGES REMAIN

While FTI has achieved some real success, both at the country level and at the global level, to maintain credibility and to expand, specific key challenges need to be addressed. These include the need for long term, predictable financial support and more focus on quality education.

Estimates for all developing countries are between US\$ 5.6 billion and US\$ 10 billion annually of external donor financing to achieve universal primary education by 2015. The FTI has committed over US\$ 120 million direct support through the Catalytic Fund. Total aid for education in FTI countries in the past three years has been approximately US\$ 350 million per year.

In addition to the expansion of basic education, an immediate challenge for the FTI partnership is to support consistent attention to educational quality issues on the part of partner countries and donors, including learning assessments, textbook distribution and quality, and the professional development of teachers. Indicators for tracking student learning outcomes in low-income countries worldwide in the EFA context, and many low-income countries have little or no experience in conducting systematic learning assessments. FTI can serve as a platform to help develop international consensus on key indicators and to raise the visibility of learning quality as a vital EFA issue. FTI funding will also be needed to build or strengthen national assessment capacity and to ensure data availability.