

February 2010 action:

Education for All?: How the international aid architecture should help conflict-affected fragile states

RESULTS
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TAKE ACTION:

Ask your MP to write to the Secretary of State for International Development to ask him to ensure his department pushes for fundamental reform of the international education aid system at the upcoming Board Meeting of the Education for All Fast Track Initiative on the 11th and 12th of February. See the last page of this action sheet for more details on what to ask for.

Introduction

In 2000 the 1,100 participants at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, agreed six 'Education for All' Goals. These included reaching the target of universal primary education by 2015, which was later adopted as the second Millennium Development Goal. Last week UNESCO released their latest Global Monitoring Report, assessing the progress that the world has made towards these goals. The report shows that 72 million primary school-aged children are still out of school. Although this is a major improvement since 2000, progress has stagnated and on the current trajectory there will still be at least 56 million children denied a basic education in 2015.

The problem of conflict-affected fragile states

While there have clearly been major advances in education over the last decade, there is a cohort of children who are being left behind. These are the poorest and most marginalised: over 50% are girls; more than half live in conflict-affected fragile states; and one third are disabled.

One of the biggest impediments to reaching the 2015 target is the difficulty of providing education in states that have weak governments or are in conflict. There are obvious issues with delivering education in these situations: schools and other infrastructure are often damaged, teachers and children can find it difficult to get to schools in safety, and government systems to supply schools are frequently weak or even non-existent. See Background Sheet 1 for more details on the problems.

Despite the difficulties, delivering education in conflict-affected states is possible. However, it requires working more flexibly, and in many cases providing education through organisations that are not the national government – for example voluntary organisations or local governments.

Problems in international education aid delivery

Delivering aid to countries affected by fragility or conflict has been a real challenge for the education

sector over recent years. Currently, a large amount of international aid to education is coordinated through the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (FTI) (see Background Sheet 2 for more details). This mechanism - which has many strengths and is currently the best that we have to coordinate education aid - nevertheless struggles to work in fragile states. With these countries containing such a large percentage of the world's out-of-school children, it is unacceptable for the FTI to continue to leave these countries behind.

Other problems with the FTI have also been identified through a recent external evaluation, which was published at the end of 2009. A detailed summary of the evaluation's findings can be found in Background Sheet 2, but a brief overview is here:

- The FTI has been too dependent on the World Bank and therefore has had restrictions imposed on its operations, often resulting in severe delays in funds being disbursed to countries;
- The FTI secretariat is too small for the job that it is trying to do, meaning that management and governance arrangements have been weak – in particular there has not been the capacity to include civil society and partner governments;
- The FTI has not managed to mobilise the levels of resources for education that it was intended to.

All of these issues are relevant to the FTI's failure to work in fragile states. The strict requirements applied to funds by the World Bank are too inflexible for engagement with fragile states; the governance failings have meant that partner countries and civil society have not been able to properly voice concerns or push through changes on this issue; while the failure to mobilise further resources is a fundamental barrier to expanding FTI support to new countries.

Why do we need a better international mechanism?

One of the barriers to achieving faster progress on the goal to achieve universal primary education has been

stagnation in the amount of international aid that has been given to education since 2004 – between 2004 and 2007 aid to education actually fell slightly. The estimated ‘financing gap’ for basic education – the amount of external aid needed to ensure that all children can access a basic education – is currently \$16 billion per year.

The FTI was designed to act as a catalyst to achieve increased levels of aid to education, but this has not happened, in part because new donors have not been persuaded that the FTI is an effective mechanism for delivering this aid. To ensure that we reverse the downward trend in education aid we need a credible multilateral body to attract new donors and increased pledges from existing donors. We believe that the most promising way to create such a body is to fundamentally transform the FTI, turning it into a more comprehensive, accountable and representative ‘Global Fund for Education’. But to have any chance of success in reaching universal primary education by 2015 we must ensure that this happens effectively and swiftly.

Reform of the FTI – what we want

A reform process is currently underway at the FTI, but progress is proving painfully slow – in fact recommendations made in 2007 and 2008 by a ‘Fragile States Task Team’ have still not been implemented. A much more robust, fundamental reform effort is therefore urgently needed.

Governance

New reforms are on the table since the evaluation report, but the FTI’s Board of Directors (who will consider the options for reform) does not adequately include developing country voices from both government and civil society, nor does it have the expertise to explore new funding mechanisms – both of which are critical to the future of the FTI. As discussions of the key elements of reform get underway in February, it will be essential that the Board of Directors mandate a Transitional Working Group, with a healthy mix of participants who both represent a wide array of stakeholders and have the expertise and qualifications to tackle the challenge of designing an effective aid architecture.

In addition, the FTI Board should opt for an immediate expansion of its membership, and take steps within weeks to recruit Board members who represent both civil society and developing countries. This will help provide a much stronger foundation for future efforts to

improve the accountability and fundraising power of the FTI.

Financing

Without ambitious and bold reform, the FTI risks missing the opportunity to attract new donors, innovative sources of revenue and faster financing modalities. The stagnation in education aid will only worsen if the FTI is unable to step up to the plate and take on a bold expansion agenda. Unfortunately the board is not planning the ambitious scale-up of funding that is needed to effectively reach a larger group of countries, including fragile states. Financing is relegated to the second stage of reform discussions, and the amount of money that the partnership is planning to mobilise is far too low – they plan to aim for \$1 billion per year, a full \$15 billion below the external aid needed just to deliver basic education for all.

How you can influence the reform agenda

The UK has played a major role in aid to education over recent years, committing a large amount of money to the sector. Because it is such a large donor, the Department for International Development is a prominent Board member at the FTI, and will therefore play a key role in the discussions about reforms at meetings on the 11th and 12th February.

Write to your MP, asking him or her to contact Douglas Alexander, the Secretary of State for International Development to tell him that his Department needs to go into the FTI Board meeting with an ambitious reform agenda to enable the initiative to reach children who are missing out on education in conflict-affected and fragile states. Specific elements that we want to see DFID push for include:

- Ensuring that the FTI reform process is led by a group that is representative of all stakeholders, including recipient governments and civil society. We recommend establishing a ‘Transitional Working Group’ that is both representative and includes members who have the expertise required to design innovative and effective financing and coordination mechanisms, as well as immediately reforming the Board to become more representative.
- Immediately tackling the issue of financing, setting a target that relates to the real financing gap for education rather than past performance of the FTI.