

## TAKE ACTION – November 2007

### Education for All by 2015 – removing the barriers

**ACTION:** Write to your local MP (House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA).

1. Introduce yourself if you have not written before.
1. Reflect on the importance of education in fighting poverty
2. Highlight the three barriers to achieving Education for All: school fees, lack of teachers and imposed wage ceilings.
3. Stress the influence the UK government can have at the World Bank and in its leadership role.
4. Ask whether DFID plans to increase its funding for education directed via the Fast Track Initiative
5. Ask for your letter to be forwarded to the Secretary of State for International Development.

“77 million children are waking up today and not able to go to school. They will spend their day working at home, collecting wood or water, looking for paid work or begging in the streets – wondering what their future holds for them.”

Jasmine Whitbeard, Save the Children Fund, May 2007

As we discussed last month, despite the progress made in reducing the number of children out of school since the 1990s, there is still a long way to go. Seventy-seven million children still have no access to primary education and a fifth of the world's adult population can't read and write, two-thirds of them women.

Education is a prerequisite for achieving better health, higher incomes, and greater participation in community life.

So what makes it difficult for a country to achieve Education for All? Three clear barriers can be identified:

1. The continued existence of school fees
2. Lack of trained teachers
3. Wage ceilings imposed by external bodies making it difficult for governments to employ enough teachers.

#### School fees

Many poor countries instituted school fees in the 1980s and 1990s at the behest of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as part of policies designed to reduce debt and spending. Although the World Bank reversed its policy in 2001 (in part due to lobbying from RESULTS), a number of poor countries, mostly in Africa, continue to charge some type of fee for basic education.

School fees come in various forms. Parents may be required to pay for tuition fees, textbooks, compulsory uniforms, parent-teacher associations and exams, for example. Then there are the indirect costs including transport to school and food.

All these costs have a significant impact on whether a poor family can afford to send their children to school.

Between 2000 and 2005 many countries abolished school fees, including Lesotho (2000), Cambodia (2001), Zambia (2002), Kenya (2003), Mozambique (2004) and Burundi (2005). The dramatic surge in enrolments that followed is strong evidence that payment of even modest fees is a major obstacle for poor families.

For example, when Burundi cut school fees they planned for an additional 250,000 children in the classroom, but in the event over twice that number turned up. These were children who were not even on the government's radar screen.

“User fees in primary education are pervasive and a serious obstacle to enrollment and completion for millions of children around the world.”

*Education Sector, Human Development Network, World Bank, 2004*

## Finding enough teachers

The quality of tuition that children receive when they finally get to school relies on the supply of well-trained, properly paid teachers. Worldwide it has been estimated that 18 million new teachers will be needed by 2015, 4 million in Africa alone, to meet the target of providing quality primary education for all.

There is clearly a need to massively scale up efforts in teacher training and recruitment to meet demand, particularly when enrolments increase suddenly following the abolition of school fees.

The challenge is more than one of just numbers. The quality of teachers and teaching is essential to ensure that the children stay enrolled and come out of school with the literacy and numeracy skills they need.

One of the best ways rich countries can help to fund increased teacher training facilities is through the Fast Track Initiative (FTI), a multi-donor mechanism that provides funds to countries that have produced strong National Education Plans.

So far, 31 countries have had their plans endorsed and a further 8 are expected to join next year. However, the FTI can only work if donor countries continue to pledge support. At present only \$1.1 billion of the \$1.9 billion needed for 2008 has been promised, leaving a \$800 million shortfall for 2008.

The UK has so far been very supportive of the FTI, committing to spend £152 million over a three-year period to 2009. It is also the second highest contributor, following the Netherlands, to the FTI's Catalytic Fund, which helps countries which have plans but cannot access funds through their usual donors.

However, the bulk of this pledge has already been paid in 2006 and 2007 and the final tranche of funds for 2008 is only £10 million. This will not allow the FTI to bridge its spending gap. It appears that no increase has been made to reflect Gordon Brown's promise of £8.5 billion for education made in April 2006.

## Wage ceilings

A major barrier to the employment of teachers is the continued existence of public

sector wage ceilings imposed by the IMF to control government spending. Teachers constitute the largest single group in any public sector wage bill, so if a government is under pressure to cut the overall wage bill, the easiest place to start is to block recruitment of new teachers.

Clearly, Ministries of Education are in the best position to determine how many teachers are needed, based on requests from schools. Unfortunately, the decision is often taken out of their hands. Where IMF conditions are imposed, the Education Ministry is simply told by the government's Ministry of Finance how many new teachers can be hired.

In Mozambique, for example, when the Ministry of Education asked for 12,000 extra teachers earlier this year to reduce class sizes (the pupil/teacher ratio is currently 74:1), it was only allowed to hire 9000.

The FTI recommends that class sizes should not exceed 40, yet it is common to hear of classes with more than 100, which undeniably adversely affects the quality of education provided.

## What do we want the UK to do?

The UK government should clearly state its active opposition to school fees and work with government to find more equitable and sustainable ways to finance primary education. The UK should also ensure that no African country plan they support is using user fees.

To ensure that the UK's promised £8.5 billion aid to education is spent wisely and effectively more should be directed towards the FTI.

The UK government must use its considerable influence at the World Bank and IMF to ensure that their policies on public sector wage ceilings do not make it difficult for governments to hire all the teachers they need.

This sheet uses information from the 2007 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report ([www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)), DFID ([www.dfid.gov.uk](http://www.dfid.gov.uk)), Action Aid ([www.actionaid.org](http://www.actionaid.org)) and the Fast Track Initiative ([www.education-fast-track.org](http://www.education-fast-track.org))

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