

Education Program Development Fund (EPDF) Strategy Committee

Minutes of Meeting on December 2, 2005

1. A meeting of the Education Program Development Fund (EPDF) Strategy Committee (SC) was held in Beijing (China) on December 2, 2005. The meeting was chaired by Olav Seim (Norway) acting for Ruth Kagia (World Bank). It was attended by: Desmond Bermingham (UK), Máire Matthews (Ireland); Ewa Werner-Dahlin (Sweden); and Eva Kløve (Norway).
2. Observers included: Ronald Siebes, Rebekka van Roemburg (the Netherlands); Jee-Peng Tan, Christopher Thomas, Eduardo Velez Bustillo, Robert Prouty (World Bank); Abhimanyu Singh (UNESCO), Scott Walter (Canada), Anton Jensen, Renata Russell (EC), Sandrine Boucher, Alain Dhersigny, Jean-Claude Balmès (France), Antonio García Ferrer (Spain), Ko-Chih Tung (UIS); and Hans Schipulle, Temby Caprio (Germany). Other participants were: Mercy Tembon (Manager of the EPDF), Rosemary Bellew, Kouassi Soman, Palak Mehra, Anna Triponel, Abigail Spring and Luc-Charles Gacougnolle (FTI Secretariat).
3. The agenda included:
 - Summary of Status
 - Timing of annual consultations and allocation decisions
 - Decisions on revised Terms of Reference of Regional Reference Groups (RRGs)

Summary of Status

4. After an overview of the agenda, the Chair invited Mercy Tembon to present a progress summary of the EPDF based on the December 2005 Status Report the Secretariat had prepared. In her presentation, Mercy indicated that pledges for 2006 have more than tripled as compared to the previous year; and they are expected to increase from US\$5.81 million to US\$29.73 million over the 2005-07 period. Nevertheless and in spite of recent pledges from the UK, Ireland and Sweden, Norway still remained the main contributor to the EPDF. On the recipient side, funds have been allocated to all eligible regions except Europe and Central Asia which did not apply. Given initial delays in regional allocations, implementation has been slow and only about 20 percent of the US\$5.4 million allocated have been disbursed to date.

Summary of Discussions

5. The discussions that followed included: (i) ways to attract more donors to buy into the EPDF which is becoming instrumental for capacity building at regional as well as country level in many part of the developing world; (ii) ways to liaise/collaborate more effectively with other partners such UNECSO and UNICEF that have both the expertise and the capacity on the ground to help strength institutions and country processes; (iii) ways to develop regional networks to synthesize best practices, conduct research and create learning opportunities; and (iv) the general consensus that the EPDF could be one of the best vehicles to support fragile states develop their education sector programs (re: item 1.4 of the Co-Chairs' Conclusions of the Beijing Meetings).
6. Next, regional updates and steps forward were presented by three Sector Managers (AFR, EAS and LAC) who attended the meeting. Progress in Africa under the Norwegian Trust Fund (NETF) and its regional work-program (expected to be financed by the EPDF) were outlined by

Jee-Peng Tan who emphasized on capacity building and inter-agency collaboration with ADEA and other institutions. Christopher Thomas seized the opportunity to report on specific country activities funded by the EPDF in the East Asia and Pacific Region. Out of six country programs, three had made progress with about \$100,000 disbursed to date (Cambodia, Mongolia and Pacific Islands). Moreover, he gave the example of on-going collaborative efforts with the Beijing University (CIEFR) and other regional institutions with the aim of reaching poor and marginalized populations. Finally, Eduardo Velez Bustillo pinpointed to similar efforts in the Latin America and Caribbean Region with an emphasis on knowledge sharing, South-South exchange programs and collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank and other institutions.

Annual Consultations and Allocation Decisions

7. The first issue and decision point was related to the timing of annual consultations and allocation decisions. The meeting concurred with the FTI Secretariat's recommendation of option (a) which consists of (i) presenting the first Annual Reports of the EPDF in March 2006 during the FTI Technical Meetings; (ii) scheduling the decision regarding allocations at the time of the Annual Meetings in November 2006. This decision will enable the regions to complete a full year cycle of implementation which will, in turn, allow them to report on achievements and plan activities for the following year.

8. It was acknowledged that such a decision might also present some timing discrepancies between reporting in March and allocation decisions in November. In particular, this presents a serious problem for the Africa Region in light of the merger between the NETF and the EPDF. Therefore, an exception will be made for Africa, allowing the region to present its 2006 work-program as soon as possible and request its funding under the combined EPDF/NETF.

Terms of Reference (TORs) of Regional Reference Groups (RRGs)

9. The second issue and decision point was related to the establishment of the Regional Reference Groups, a topic which had been discussed on several occasions previously. The discussions were guided by a revised TORs for such groups that the Secretariat has prepared as part of the EPDF Status Report for December 2005. In spite of a long and protracted debate, no clear agreement was reached. While donors insisted on the need to have such regional advisory groups for yearly consultation and collaboration between EFA partners (but not quality control groups), the Bank was concerned that it might create new bureaucratic fora with limited added value beyond those that existed already. At the end, the EPDF-SC Meeting decided to: (i) rename those Regional Advisory Groups (RAGs); and (ii) adopt the TORs as is for a one-year implementation. Relevant lessons and necessary adjustments would be examined at the end of that period.

Cleared with and cc: Olav Seim, Acting Chair, and Education Program Development Fund Strategy Committee