

For media inquiries, please contact:
Angela Bekkers, tel: (in Japan): (+81) (0) 8058909634
Email: Abekkers@educationfasttrack.org
Tomoko Hirai, tel: (+81) (03) 3597 6665
Email: Thirai@worldbank.org

PRESS RELEASE

18 million out-of-school children can be sent to class for US \$1 a week

Tokyo, 23 April 2008 – Despite the recent progress in enrolling millions of poor children into primary school, many low-income countries are unable to obtain adequate financing to implement their national education plans. The Education for All Fast Track Initiative (FTI), a global international partnership that currently supports the education goals in 35 developing countries, wants to provide immediate support to 18 million children who are out of school. The Fast Track Initiative donor partners are meeting in Tokyo this week to make additional commitments to FTI's Catalytic Fund to help get every child around the world educated.

The financial resources needed for this financing instrument of the FTI partnership is estimated at \$1 billion annually from this year onwards. For around 1 US dollar per student per week, 18 million poor children can enroll into primary school for the first time. This translates into a subsidy of 1.25 US dollar per capita per year of the population living in the ten largest donor countries. Without education, without the ability to read and to write, these children cannot escape the poverty trap. "By setting the ambitious target of adding 10 new countries to the partnership this year, FTI aims at providing 18 million out-of-school children with quality basic education", says Desmond Bermingham, Head of the EFA – FTI Secretariat.

The Education Fast Track Initiative – this year under the co-chairmanship of G8 President Japan and The Netherlands - will build on the remarkable accomplishments in education over the past decade. Globally, the number of out-of-school children has dropped from 96 million in 1999 to 72 million in 2005¹. The FTI has helped many countries to make progress. In countries with FTI-endorsed education plans, the number of out-of-school children has decreased by 26% since 2000.

"For all people and all nations, education is the basis for engendering self-reliance and development" says Takehiro Kano, Senior Coordinator for Global Issues with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and Co-chair of FTI's Steering Committee this year. "Japan, as G8 president and the host to the Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV), intends to highlight education as one of the key sectors in the Millennium Development Goals, from the viewpoint of 'human security' focusing on protecting and empowering individuals as well as their communities."

¹ UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008 (November 2007)

Many low-income countries, most of them in Sub-Saharan Africa, have expressed a strong interest in joining the FTI partnership in the coming years. Around three quarters of the investment to increase primary completion rates is funded by the developing countries themselves. However, these countries need more long-term and predictable external financing to achieve their education goals.

“We need sustainable and predictable financing for sound education systems”, says Ali Aires Bonifacio Baptista, Minister of Education and Culture of Mozambique. “We need to hire and train teachers, acquire school materials, build schools and develop curricula. These are long-term investments with long-term gains.”

The FTI partnership has been praised by the international community as a model of donor harmonization. Early results show that its Catalytic Fund has been effective in providing additional resources to implement sound education sector plans. Nonetheless, the Catalytic Fund faces an imminent financial crisis. An additional US\$ 1 billion will be needed this year. With an expansion agenda to support the education MDGs in about 56 low-income countries by the end of 2009 and their need for sustainable and transparent funding, the Catalytic Fund will require an estimated \$1 billion annually for the period 2010 – 2014, totaling \$5 billion in all.

“The Netherlands has supported the Education Fast Track Initiative since its inception in 2002” , notes Ronald Siebes, Senior Education Advisor with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and co-chair of FTI’s Steering Committee. „We are committed to spending 15% of our aid budget on education in developing countries. We hope that other donors as well can provide substantial support to developing countries that come forward with good and ambitious education strategies.”

All donor and developing partners agree that, combined with the financial support, it will be essential to address capacity challenges. For most low-income countries, there are significant capacity gaps at the individual, organizational, and institutional levels when implementing national education strategies. As emphasized by Japan during this year’s co-chairmanship of the FTI Steering Committee, capacity development involves fostering institutional environments and organizations in a comprehensive way, including the processes of change management.

About the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (FTI):

The FTI is a global partnership supported by over 30 major bilateral and multilateral agencies, including the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF and several regional development banks. The FTI’s biannual Donors Technical Meeting is held in Tokyo through the 25th of April, as G8 President Japan currently holds the chairmanship of FTI’s Steering Committee, jointly with The Netherlands.

For more information, please see: www.education-fast-track.org