

The Education for All – Fast Track Initiative



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Introduction

The Education for All Fast Track Initiative (FTI) is a global partnership to help low income countries to achieve the education Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of ensuring that every child receives a good quality primary education. The FTI is supported by over 30 bilateral and multilateral donor agencies and has provided support to over 60 countries around the world, including many from the Commonwealth. Table 1 lists the countries which have already become full FTI partners or are expected to join over the next two years.

FTI – a global partnership

The FTI is built on a compact between donors and the developing countries they support. Countries prepare their plans for the expansion of the education sector. These plans should take account of budget and other resource constraints and should be prepared in consultation with local stakeholders including parents, teachers and non government organisations (NGOs) supporting the education sector. In some countries, even the children themselves are involved in the development of the plans. The education plans should also be linked to broader national policies to reduce poverty, build basic infrastructure and promote economic growth.

On their side of the compact, donors commit to provide long term and predictable aid to support the implementation of the plan. Donors also agree to work together and reduce the costs of providing aid for the education sector, for example by holding joint review missions, aligning their support with the government's own plans and minimising additional reporting requirements. In almost all cases, the majority of financing for the education sector is provided from domestic resources so it is particularly important that donor financing is provided in line with national budget systems.¹

First phase: impact summary

The FTI was launched in 2002 and, in its first four years, has already had a significant impact on education in the countries it has supported. A recent impact assessment carried out by the World Bank found that FTI helped to achieve significant progress in the first eleven countries to join the initiative: primary enrolments have increased in ten out of the eleven countries, in some cases by over 50%; completion rates have improved in most

countries; and there has been a significant reduction in the gender gap at the primary level.² Table 2 provides a summary of impact in the first phase of FTI.

As well as the progress on education indicators, the FTI has also begun to have a positive impact on the effectiveness of aid to the education sector. Donor collaboration has increased and donors have begun to align themselves more consistently behind the country's own development plan. All of the FTI countries examined in the progress report noted an increase in joint planning and greater use of the education sector plan as the framework for support to the sector.

In the long run, this is likely to have a lasting impact on the effectiveness of donor support for education and possibly beyond. FTI has been widely recognised as one of the most advanced examples of the enactment of principles of donor harmonisation and alignment set out in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.³

FTI: not just about financing

The four 'gaps'

While much of the emphasis of the FTI has focused on the need to mobilise additional resources for the education sector, the FTI partners have stressed from the outset that the FTI must be about more than financing. The FTI was designed to help partner countries address all of the constraints which prevent them from achieving the education MDGs. The FTI documents talk about the 'four gaps': the policy gap; the data gap; the capacity gap and of course, the financing gap.⁴

The 'policy gap' is broadly defined as the absence of effective policies to improve the quality and efficiency of education systems in each country. For example, policies to deal with the particular challenges of educating children in rural communities; policies to encourage girls to attend school; or policies to improve the quality of education and to strengthen the assessment systems.

The FTI partners have established a special fund – the Education Programme Development Fund or EPDF – to assist countries in the development of their plans and to help to share knowledge and experience on policies that work. The EPDF has already supported a wide range of activities involving Commonwealth countries (among others) such as the 2006 Association for the

**Table 1 FTI partner countries**

<i>Initial FTI countries (end of 2002) (7)</i>	<i>Additional countries as of July 15, 2006 (13)</i>	<i>Countries pending for 2006 (12)</i>	<i>Countries pending for 2007 (12)</i>	<i>Countries with no specific entry date (15)</i>
Burkina Faso Guinea Guyana Honduras Mauritania Nicaragua Niger	Djibouti Ethiopia Gambia, The Ghana Kenya Lesotho Madagascar Moldova Mozambique Tajikistan Timor Leste Vietnam Yemen, Republic of	Albania Benin Bhutan Burundi Cambodia Cameroon Mali Mongolia Rwanda Sao Tome and Principe Senegal Sierra Leone	Angola Bangladesh Chad Congo, Republic of Georgia Guinea-Bissau Haiti Kiribati Kyrgyz Republic Solomon Islands Vanuatu Zambia	Bolivia Central African Republic Democratic Republic of Congo Eritrea India Indonesia Lao PDR Liberia Malawi Nigeria Pakistan Sri Lanka Togo Uganda United Republic of Tanzania

Source: FTI Progress Report (World Bank, 2006)

Table 2 Progress in FTI partner countries^{a,b}

	<i>Pupils enrolled</i>		<i>Gross intake ratio (%)</i>				<i>Primary completion rate (%)</i>			
	<i>2004/5</i>	<i>% increase from 2000</i>	<i>Girls</i>		<i>Boys</i>		<i>Girls</i>		<i>Boys</i>	
			<i>2000</i>	<i>2004/5</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2004/5</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2004/5</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2004/5</i>
Benchmark	n.a.		100		100		100		100	
Burkina Faso	1,321,300	55	39	62	53	70	21	28	30	35
Gambia, The	174,836	13	76	83	77	79	62	–	77	–
Guinea	1,207,000	53	56	83	63	95	21	42	45	66
Guyana	114,161	5	124	140	130	140	114	92	109	99
Honduras	1,257,358	15	139	127	139	129	–	82	–	77
Mauritania	434,181	22	87	105	86	106	44	41	51	45
Mozambique	3,569,473	40	102	129	117	138	13	23	20	35
Nicaragua	941,957	12	142	135	151	144	70	77	62	70
Niger	1,064,000	84	35	51	49	68	13	20	20	30
Vietnam	8,350,191	-17	105	95	108	101	94	98	99	104
Yemen, Republic of	3,220,282	31	78	117	102	136	39	46	78	78

Source: FTI Progress Report (World Bank, 2006)

^a The Report reviewed progress in the first eleven countries to join the FTI partnership where there was sufficient data available to assess the impact of the initiative. The report stresses the need to avoid attributing progress solely to the FTI as many of these countries had launched important reforms before joining the initiative. The FTI's contribution is in supporting and complementing the country's own efforts.

^b The decline in gross enrolment in Vietnam is probably due to improvements in efficiency of the system and the reduction in numbers of over-age children in primary schools.



Development of Education in Africa biennale meeting and the recent visit of African education ministers to Singapore and Vietnam to share experiences from the Asia context.⁵

FTI partners also recognised at an early stage, the importance of helping countries collect good quality data on all aspects of the education system. In this area, FTI works closely with agencies such as the UNESCO Institute of Statistics and the Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report team, based in UNESCO headquarters in Paris. The FTI aims to add value to the work of these partners by helping to increase the global demand for good quality data in the education sector, as well providing additional data on the financing of the sector. This will be a key area for more intensive work for the FTI over the coming years.

The final gap – the capacity gap – is possibly also the most important. The limited human resources at all levels represent a major constraint for countries wishing to move ahead quickly in the expansion of their education systems. Training and recruiting more teachers, education managers and public sector workers is a major challenge. The preliminary findings of the FTI capacity development task team indicate that this is a neglected area in many of the education sector plans so far submitted. Germany has indicated that it intends to make this a priority area for attention during its period as co-chair of the FTI in 2007.

How does FTI work?

Qualifying for FTI

FTI is designed to support and strengthen the dialogue between governments and their development partners at the country level. Decisions are made in country with the FTI Secretariat playing a supporting role and assisting with communication to the broader FTI partnership.

To be eligible for FTI support, a country must have a Poverty Reduction Strategy (or equivalent) in place and it must have an education sector plan which includes a focus on primary education and achieving gender parity.⁶

The FTI does not require countries to prepare separate plans; instead it uses the country's own education sector plan. The appraisal of these plans is done jointly in-country by the government and local donor group. The FTI Secretariat is responsible for assuring the quality of the process and keeping the partnership informed of developments at the country level. Once the appraisal has been completed, the donors (and in some cases NGO partners) sign a joint endorsement letter confirming that, in their view, the education plan is 'credible' and pledging to provide support. The country is then considered to be a full FTI partner and eligible for further financial and technical support when needed.

Role of FTI

The FTI emphasises that the first option for support should be the bilateral and multilateral donor programmes already existing in country. If the local donors are able to meet the financing needs identified in the plan, they are encouraged to do so directly as this is likely to be the most efficient mechanism for scaling up aid.

This may include budget support as well as government resources available, for example, as a result of debt relief.

If the government and in-country donors are unable to meet the full financing needs, there are also funds available directly from the FTI, through the FTI Catalytic Fund. This fund was originally designed as short term support for up to three years to bridge the gap while other donors prepared their plans to provide longer term financing support.

However, experience has shown that donors are reluctant to fill the gap particularly when this involves establishing new country programmes. In response to this, the donors supporting the Catalytic Fund have proposed an extension to allow support from the Fund to continue after the initial three year period, subject to good performance and a continuing financing need.⁷

By September 2006, the Catalytic Fund had disbursed just over \$100 million to 14 countries. As Figure 1 shows, the Catalytic Fund currently has commitments of some \$250 million per year over the next 2 years. This will represent nearly 10% of aid for basic education in low income countries and will make the Fund an important additional source of financing for the education sector, although it should always be viewed as a complement to, not a substitution for bilateral and multilateral financing for the sector.

During the past year, the Catalytic Fund has proved particularly successful in disbursing financing quickly to countries once they had completed the endorsement process. For example, Kenya received its first Catalytic Fund allocation of \$24 million just over six months after the first application.

In several cases, this has allowed the country to move ahead with the implementation of its plan and has helped to maintain the momentum while other donors are finalising the arrangements for their longer term financing.

How is FTI managed?

Three levels

The management and governance structure of FTI comprises three principal levels.⁸

- i. The full FTI Partnership of donors, developing country partners and NGOs. This partnership meets once every year, usually linked to the UNESCO EFA High Level Group meeting. The first such linked meeting was in Brasilia in 2004, followed by Beijing in 2005 and Cairo in November 2006.
- ii. The FTI Steering Committee led by the two co-chairs (currently Russia and the EC); the outgoing co-chair (currently Belgium); a minister of education from a developing country (Madagascar); a representative from the NGO community (Global Campaign for Education); plus the World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF as the principal multilateral agencies involved in education.
- iii. The FTI Secretariat is housed in the World Bank but is accountable, through the Steering Committee, to the FTI Partnership as a whole. The Secretariat is responsible for managing the day-to-day implementation of the FTI and providing support to the steering committee and the partnership meetings.

Role of the World Bank

The World Bank was a key protagonist in the early stages of the FTI and continues to have a leading role in the implementation of the programme. But the FTI is a global partnership in the full sense of the term and decisions on policy and implementation can only be made by the Steering Committee representing the broader FTI Partnership. The FTI derives substantial benefit from its close relationship with the World Bank, in particular drawing on its legal, financial and technical expertise and thereby removing the need to create separate administrative structures.

The day to day operations of the Fast Track Initiative, including the FTI trust funds, are managed by the Secretariat and the implementation of the programmes is mostly done through World Bank projects, in consultation with the local donor group. Allocation decisions for the FTI trust funds are made by a strategy committee, chaired by the Vice President of the World Bank, following recommendations on financing needs from the in-country donor group.

FTI: achievements to date...

The FTI has helped many countries to make significant advances towards the education MDGs. It is difficult – and probably not very fruitful – to determine the extent to which progress in these countries can be directly attributed to the initiative. In any case,

the credit for the success should go to the parents, teachers, education managers and the ministers themselves as the people struggling on a day to day basis, often in extremely difficult circumstances, to achieve such remarkable progress. The FTI aims to provide a framework to deliver the support they need, more effectively and with greater impact. Table 3 provides some examples of the achievements of FTI Commonwealth countries over the past four years.

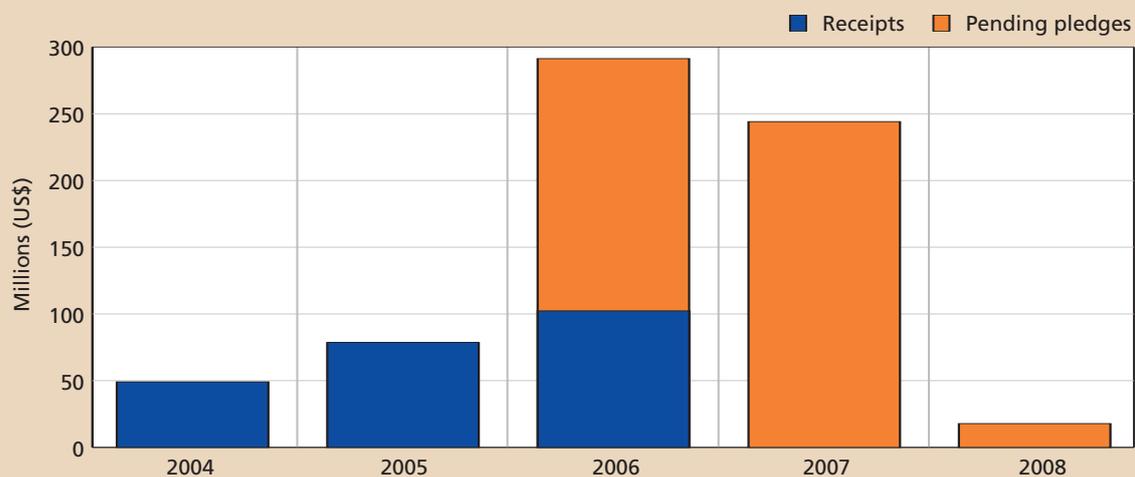
...and the challenges ahead

Challenges

The FTI Progress Report notes that the initiative has had a significant positive impact in its short life span but stresses that it faces many challenges as it expands over the next few years.

These challenges include the need to respond to the demands of the larger population countries, most of which are currently not considered a part of the Fast Track. The progress report recommends that FTI partnership should include such countries in the next stage of the expansion. This may involve operating at the sub-national level in federal countries such as Nigeria and Pakistan where financing for the basic education sector is a state or provincial responsibility. (World Bank, 2006)

Figure 1 The FTI catalytic fund: pledges and commitments



The graph shows commitments and pledges received by August 2006. It does not include a recent pledge of an additional 100 million euros made by the Netherlands government.

Table 3 Achievements in FTI Commonwealth countries

The Gambia
achieved a 13% increase in the number of pupils enrolled

Ghana
enrolled almost 400,000 more children over 4 years

Guyana
increased the number of teachers by 35%, with a particular focus on the interior remote regions of the country

Kenya
disbursed over US\$24 million over less than 6 months, to allow every primary school in the country to purchase books and materials



Expansion

Expansion to the larger countries will bring even greater urgency to the need to address the second challenge identified by the progress report: the absence of sufficient long term and predictable financing to enable developing countries to implement their education plans.

The UNESCO estimate is that up to \$7 billion in aid will be required in order to help countries achieve the goal of universal primary education (UPE).⁹ Aid for basic education has more than doubled over the past four years but at least a further doubling will be required over the next four years if this target is to be reached. This is a challenge which the FTI alone cannot achieve but, working with its donor partners, it can certainly make a significant contribution towards doing so.

Lastly, as the recent evaluation report of the World Bank's education programme¹⁰ noted, there is a widely held view that the FTI needs to work with its developing country partners to improve not just the quantity but also the quality of education provision.

The importance of this issue has been recognised from the outset by the FTI partners¹¹ and many countries have taken steps to reduce class size, increase the numbers of trained teachers and improve access to books and materials. However, there are still obviously many challenges ahead. The increased emphasis on improving learning outcomes is welcome – as this should be the principal object of all efforts in the education sector. But providing a good quality education for all children requires resources. If countries are to recruit and train teachers they need to have access to adequate and predictable financing both from domestic resources and external aid. Promises are no longer enough – action is required on all sides.

Conclusion

The FTI has demonstrated that it has put in place a mechanism to deliver effective assistance for the education sector – not just financial, but also technical and capacity building support– in an efficient way which supports the country's own plans to expand the education sector. The foundations are now firmly in place. The challenge over the next few years will be to deliver on the huge potential of this important initiative.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not represent the official policies of either the FTI or the World Bank.

Endnotes

- 1 A recent synthesis report on the education plans for some 15 African countries involved in the 'Abuja process' indicated that African countries would commit a total of over \$50 billion of domestic financing for the education sector over the period 2006 – 2015. (Financing for Development: Abuja Update : Synthesis Report)
- 2 World Bank (2006) Progress Report on FTI to the Development Committee.
- 3 OECD DAC (2005): Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.
- 4 FTI Framework document: FTI 2003.
- 5 Further details of EPDF supported activities can be found on the FTI website: www.fasttrackinitiative.org
- 6 Some FTI partners are also examining possible interim measures that would allow FTI to provide support in fragile states or conflict affected countries that do not have a PRS process in place.
- 7 This proposal is subject to final approval by the Catalytic Fund Strategy Committee. (FTI Catalytic Fund Expansion – concept note November 2005.)
- 8 The governance structure is currently described in broad terms in the FTI framework document. A more formal FTI Charter will be presented to the FTI Partnership meeting in November 2006.
- 9 Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2006 (UNESCO, Paris. 2006)
- 10 From Schooling Access to Learning Outcomes : An Unfinished Agenda. Independent Evaluation Group report. World Bank, 2006.
- 11 For example the FTI framework document states that the objective of the Initiative is: 'Accelerating Progress Towards a Quality Primary Education for All.' (Emphasis added.)



Biographical notes

Desmond Bermingham has recently taken over as the Head of the FTI Secretariat, based in the World Bank in Washington. Prior to that, he was Head of Profession for the education group in the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in London. Desmond has worked in education and development for over 15 years, providing advice on programmes in Africa, Asia, Latin America and in the Caribbean. He has a particular interest in aid effectiveness in the education sector and education in conflict-affected countries.