

Envisioning a Global Fund for Education

More, Better, Faster: Effective Aid to Achieve Education for All

Worldwide, there are more than 75 million children who are not able to go to primary school, another 226 million adolescents out of secondary school, and 770 million adults who currently lack basic literacy skills. All school-age children must start school this year if we are to meet the world's commitment of universal primary completion by 2015. Realizing this commitment will require a massive mobilization of resources for education, the rapid deployment of these resources to schools that need them, and unprecedented efforts to reach the most marginalized children. Stronger US leadership could accelerate progress towards Education for All by 2015, which is a goal within reach if international efforts are redoubled to galvanize increased funding and more effective education aid.

President Barack Obama has called for the creation of a Global Fund for Education and pledged to invest at least \$2 billion in this effort. His vision has strong backing from global civil society, other donors, and influential members of the US Congress. The call for a Global Fund for Education (GFE) provides a unique opportunity to design improved structures that are capable of delivering on Education for All while building off the strengths of existing institutions. The global compact on education needs to be reinvigorated if the world is to meet the education goals set out in 2000, and a Global Fund for Education should provide the overarching coordination and financing mechanism to ensure that funding is consistently made available to support nationally-owned education strategies.

The GFE's core objectives should be to mobilize the financing needed to accomplish the full Education for All agenda – from early learning to adult literacy – and to deliver those funds in the most effective way possible to achieve the best results in the classroom. To achieve education for all, the GFE must explicitly address the education of the hardest-to-reach and most vulnerable children living in conflict-affected and otherwise fragile states and emphasize quality in education for improved learning outcomes.

To best fulfil this function, a Global Fund for Education must be an independent entity governed jointly by donors, developing country governments, and civil society at both the global and individual country level. The Global Fund for Education should also work closely with the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF and bilateral donors to leverage the comparative advantages of all. It should build on existing coordination mechanisms such as the Education for All-Fast Track Initiative (FTI), which was set up in 2002 to accelerate financing for credible and quality national education plans – but which currently faces major shortfalls.

The Education for All-Fast Track Initiative is currently catalyzing comprehensive nationally-owned education sector plans and unprecedented country-level coordination among donors but it has not yet been able to mobilize sufficient resources or disburse funds at the pace needed. The important steps that the FTI is currently undertaking to reform its own governance structures are valuable, but these alone are unlikely to achieve education for all. Growing interest in strengthening the current global architecture for education provides an opportunity to leverage political will to increase financing and at the same time improve the impact of these investments on learning.

The creation of a Global Fund for Education should be the product of a multi-stakeholder design process that includes donors, developing countries, and civil society as equal partners. In order to catalyze discussion and debate around the creation of such a Fund, members of civil society have put forward a set of principles that we believe should guide the design process.

Guiding Principles

We envision the Global Fund for Education as the next generation of the Education for All-Fast Track Initiative by building upon its demonstrated strengths, identifying areas that can be reformed, and capitalizing on lessons learned and new opportunities globally to meet the ambitious Education for All goals. Guiding Principles for developing the GFE are:

National Ownership: One of the great strengths of the FTI that should be a core building block of its evolution into the GFE is the focus on supporting comprehensive national education plans. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness states that developing countries commit to “exercise leadership in developing and implementing their national development strategies through broad consultative processes.” The FTI has been a model for ensuring national ownership of development plans; an expanded initiative on global education must be grounded in these country-driven education sector plans while seeking to expand the consultative process to include in-country civil society.

Participatory Governance and Independence: Participatory governance at both the global and the national level will be essential to the success of the Global Fund for Education. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria ensures that civil society and developing countries have equal representation at the global level and are key partners in the country-level planning and proposal processes. The Global Fund for Education should provide for equal representation in the governance structures for donors, developing countries, and civil society and mandate the participation of all stakeholders in the development of national education plans. There should also be a Secretariat that operates independently of any individual international organization to ensure effective management and accountability for results.

Multilateral, Multi-donor, Multi-instrument: A strong and inclusive Global Fund for Education must provide a framework for increased and improved aid mobilized through a variety of modalities, while at the same time seeking to enhance multilateralism with an increased share of resources flowing through multilateral channels. The GFE should harmonize the multiple development actors so that all efforts have a greater impact together on improving education for all. Without enhanced multilateralism, it will be extremely difficult to ensure the rapid disbursement of resources to countries most at risk for failing to achieve universal basic education.

Adhering to Global Principles for Aid Effectiveness: Responding to the Accra Agenda for Action on Aid Effectiveness, the GFE will coordinate all aid – delivered through diverse channels – and focus on ensuring adherence to the broadly-accepted principles of aid effectiveness: strengthening country ownership; building effective and inclusive partnerships; and delivering and accounting for development results.

Increased, Longer-Term, and More Predictable Financing: To achieve education for all, the Global Fund for Education will have to mobilize resources on a scale far beyond what has been possible so far. The engagement of higher-level political figures in the governance and replenishment processes will be vital to raising the necessary financing. It is no less important that both national education strategies and donor commitments are integrated multi-year approaches so that countries can engage in resource-based planning and long-term predictable financing commitments become the norm. The financing target for the Global Fund for Education should be based on independent assessments at the individual country level by the UNESCO Global Monitoring Team or similar experts.

Accountability for Results: Finally, in order to achieve education for all by 2015, it will be essential to hold all stakeholders accountable for achieving results. At the country level, improved oversight and accountability of aid flows and monitoring of the learning outcomes as a result of these investments is a critical dimension of this challenge. So too is improved transparency and benchmarks for realizing donor commitments on financing for education. The Global Fund for Education needs effective benchmarks for all stakeholders – donors, recipients, and implementers – and public disclosure of the results it is achieving.
