Moderated Discussion

International Aid to Education

Introduction

The ultimate financial responsibility for improving educational access, participation, and quality lies with national governments. However, for many countries, particularly the poorest and most conflict-affected, educational progress depends, to a significant extent, on aid coming from bilateral, multilateral, and philanthropic agencies. Since 2000, when the international community pledged that no country seriously committed to achieving Education for All (EFA) would want for lack of funding, the importance of using aid to construct classrooms, distribute textbooks, pay teachers, and assess learning has increased. But many have voiced concerns that donor countries are reneging on their promises and cutting back on aid to education.

Recent evidence highlights several worrisome trends regarding aid pledges and disbursements, which have been exacerbated by the global financial crisis. First, while overall development assistance rose in 2008, after 2 years of decline, the share of all sector aid going to the education sector has remained virtually unchanged at about 12 percent since 2000. By contrast, aid to the health sector increased in the 2000–2008 period from 11 percent to 17 percent. Second, members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) disbursed approximately US$10.8 billion of overall aid to education in 2007, up from US$5.2 billion in 2002. However, the share of aid going to basic education declined from 41 percent to 38 percent during the same period. Third, the number of donors providing aid to education is concentrated among a small group of donors: only five donors account for over 60 percent of all aid commitments to basic education. This means that decisions to cut funds among certain donors can have major global reverberations. Fourth, during the recent recession some donors have sustained, or even increased, their aid commitments (e.g., the United Kingdom, the United States, Spain), while others have severely cut back (Ireland, Italy) on aid pledges. This unpredictability in future aid undermines sound educational

1 The evidence discussed in this paragraph is drawn from UNESCO (2009).
planning. Fifth, overall aid from non-OECD countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Brazil, India, China) appears to be rising; so too are the contributions of private foundations and philanthropies. However, the share of this aid targeting educational frameworks varies considerably across countries and agencies, and it is inconsistent over time. Finally, aid allocation to conflict-affected countries, where educational challenges are acute, is highly concentrated (mostly to Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and Pakistan); many other conflict-affected countries receive insufficient aid relative to their educational needs.

These trends underscore the concerns of many educational stakeholders: an inadequate level and predictability of education aid, an insufficient targeting of aid to basic education, a high concentration of aid donors, and aid flows not matching real educational need. These issues further amplify continuing debates over whether donors and recipient countries can improve aid effectiveness and developed institutional capacities and whether the EFA Fast-Track Initiative (FTI) embodies the most appropriate platform for mobilizing and disbursing funds for education, or if a new platform is necessary.

With these issues and concerns in mind, CER invited several experts—David Archer, Stephen Moseley, Karen Mundy, Felix Phiri, Liesbet Steer, and David Wiking—to participate in a special moderated discussion on international aid to education. This group brings an unusually rich array of knowledge, perspectives, and experience to the discussion, as they represent bilateral donor agencies (Moseley, Wiking), nongovernmental organizations (Archer), educational planners in national education ministries (Phiri), as well as comparative education researchers (Mundy and Steer). To create a broad basis for exchange and debate, participants were first asked to read several relevant background documents. They were then requested to respond to one or two of the following questions:

1. Around which educational challenges have multilateral and bilateral aid strategies brought about real progress on the ground over the past decade?
2. What have been the accomplishments and shortcomings in implementing the Education for All Fast-Track Initiative (FTI), which was established in 2002 as a global partnership between donor agencies and developing countries to accelerate progress toward free, universal primary education by 2015?
3. Given the current global financial crisis and the long-term global economic situation, which policy options best address the challenges facing donor agencies and recipient countries in mobilizing and effectively distributing international aid for education?

3 Chapter 4, on “Increasing Aid and Improving Governance,” from the EFA Global Monitoring Report (2009); a recent paper by Gene Sperling (2008) calling for a global education fund; a position paper by the Global Campaign for Education (2009); Steer and Wathne (2009).
The initial discussion was joined by four colleagues; additional viewpoints emerged at a subsequent stage with contributions from other participants. The entire moderated discussion was then edited and shortened. We believe that these exchanges will enable CER readers to better appreciate the tone and parameters of the ongoing debate over aid to education and to begin clarifying sound policy options.

Aaron Benavot

INITIAL DISCUSSION

STEPHEN MOSELEY

The reference papers offer excellent reviews of the financial challenges accompanying the achievement of the six EFA goals. However, those unfamiliar with the extraordinary progress already made since 2000 might get the incorrect impression that little has been accomplished thus far and that the goals—in whole or in part—are unlikely to be reached by 2015. Such impressions would be unfortunate.

Dramatic progress has occurred in much of Central and South America, in at least half of the countries of Africa, as well as in some of the poorest and most challenged countries in Asia, not to mention continuing progress in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Caucasus. Moreover, data from the Academy for Educational Development (AED) Educational Policy and Data Center not only confirm such progress but state that most countries are moving at a faster pace to universalize basic education and expand secondary education than at any other time in history.4

Countries around the world share a vision of the elements necessary to provide a quality education for all students—regardless of their residence, gender, disability status, and age. And there is greater recognition of the importance of addressing the educational needs of youth, former child combatants, and previously ill-served populations. Indeed, leaders across the globe have committed themselves to an emergent “education order.” These commitments are informed by an international conversation and healthy debate, which underscore the need for cross-country comparisons and regularly monitored educational targets.

Today, multilateral institutions—including UNESCO, the Institute for Statistics, UNICEF, and FTI—are models of cooperation and communication. They recognize that national leaders play critical roles in facilitating progress and determining future objectives. Such institutions should continue to build on this positive track record by supporting the comparative advantages of

4 Educational Policy and Data Center (2005).
multilateral and bilateral entities and by reinforcing collaborations that acknowledge different country needs and donor agency perspectives.

Where the community of donors, advocates, and national leaders has faltered is in translating the enormous need for increased global investment into donor commitments for systemic and comprehensive EFA improvement efforts. At best, the current international aid level is one-half or one-third of what it should be—probably $15–$18 billion per year. A deepening global recession is eroding many countries’ overall budgets, including for education. This decline continues despite attempts to maintain the education share at 15–20 percent of the national budget. Demands for other social investments, business rejuvenation, and development programs further undermine education allocation levels. And within the education budget, many countries are increasing funding for secondary and technical education to support workforce readiness and skills training.

The call for a new independent, multilateral entity that would plan, fund, implement, disburse, and measure all aspects of the EFA movement is unlikely to occur. Realistically, not all donors want to join a single global education fund, given the difficulty of maintaining the accountability, quality improvement, and overall results that each expects.

What is needed is a common voice at the global level—a collective, institutional advocacy effort, amplified by the nongovernmental organization (NGO) community and working in partnership with government counterparts, to increase funding from donors and respond better to country needs. This international effort must include foundations, businesses, and, especially, national congresses and parliaments. Leading educational stakeholders and advocacy organizations, together with bilateral and multinational agencies, must develop a business plan to achieve the necessary funding for which everyone takes responsibility. This plan should also address deficiencies in institutional capacity and in data collection and analysis.

The idea of a common global fund should not interfere with the successful, collaborative process already in place among EFA stakeholders. The international community does not deserve an untested substitute that risks repeating, but not solving, the problems that ongoing evaluations have preliminarily identified.

Having said that, recent FTI evaluation documents highlight the need to improve planning capacities and ensure that donated funds—especially in relief and emergency situations, and for country planning—are distributed rapidly, without undue bureaucracy. Champions and technical specialists of education funding must work even more closely to serve and collaborate with recipient countries. Developing a new business plan–based approach would support country leadership and help secure an annual aid sum of $15 billion, thereby ensuring that all children receive the high-quality education they deserve.
Most developing countries and their external partners can take pride in the achievements toward the EFA goals in the past decade. The improvements in access to primary education have been particularly evident. However, while many countries are on track to achieve universal primary education and gender parity in education, more than 70 million children and 770 million adults are denied the right to education and literacy. Access remains a major challenge in the poorest countries together with serious quality deficiencies resulting in many children leaving primary education without basic literacy and numeracy skills. In addition, the current worldwide economic decline may jeopardize recent gains and make it even more difficult for national systems to sustain policy reform and strategic investments in the education sector.

The progress registered so far can be attributed to a combination of national efforts—for example, strengthened political priorities and increased public funding—and international development cooperation efforts through external aid to education. Every government has a responsibility to ensure that its citizens realize their right to quality education and to sustain financing of EFA through domestic resource mobilization. Current levels of external aid to education are inadequate to close the large financing gaps in priority EFA areas.

In spite of increased allocations by some donors, aid to education in the poorest countries is insufficient and must become more effective and efficient. A dilemma in resource-scarce countries is that the ability to use aid effectively is not always conducive to convincing donors to make additional financial commitments. These constraints, and others, underscore the institutional weaknesses of both partner countries and funding agencies.

In my opinion, there are no excuses (e.g., the “limited absorption capacity” in a partner country) for donor countries to restrain from increasing and improving education funding to low-income countries, which lag behind in developing more effective and inclusive education systems. Radical and innovative ways to assist partner countries must be sought to address long-term financing needs, including the possibilities of increasing local revenue and equalizing the distribution of education resources. “Absorption” constraints should be addressed by long-term capacity-enhancing support, such as lowering transaction costs. Concurrently, short-term delivery must be ensured so as to maximize the direct benefits from limited resources. For example, if it takes time to build and equip schools, train teachers, and develop better teaching-learning materials, then approaches bridging “emergency”-oriented aid with development aid should be explored, such as school feeding programs through the World Food Program or the provision of learning materials to all schools, teachers, and students. Country ownership and leadership are crucial.
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The FTI is a step in the right direction, although the funding modality attached to it remains to be sorted out. Bilateral cooperation needs to be complemented by a global mechanism like FTI. Despite various problems, the FTI has generated additional funding and managed to do what many other global financing mechanisms have failed to do, namely, to honor the principles of ownership, alignment, harmonization, mutual accountability, and aid effectiveness. To my knowledge, the FTI is the only global initiative where program support is supposed to be the default mechanism rather than the odd exception.

The FTI can function relatively well, thanks to its compatibility with the Paris and Accra Agenda on aid effectiveness. But that also makes it less appealing to some and more difficult to explain and “sell” to many others. Replacing the FTI with a global education fund, or renaming it, makes sense, only if doing so attracts new money while at the same time adhering to the principles of program support, avoiding fragmented ad hoc funding, respecting country ownership of education policies and plans, and aligning with national governance systems.

FELIX PHIRI

In Zambia, two educational challenges—namely, access and quality—have recorded considerable progress over the past decade. In the area of access, Zambia saw enrollments in basic education grow from 2.85 million in 2005 to 3.33 million in 2008. This represents an increase of 17 percent over this period. The major contributing factor to this notable enrollment growth was the change in education policy, particularly in reducing user fee charges in schools and enabling communities to set up community schools. The key policy pronouncement of Free Basic Education (grades 1–7) in February 2002 aimed at removing major barriers to educational access: in particular, abolishing user fees and not requiring the wearing of school uniforms. Furthermore, the government endeavored to make available to pupils important learning materials such as books, pens, erasers, and rulers. In 2003 the government also embarked on an infrastructure construction program to address the imbalance in school provision, particularly in rural areas. Many community schools were founded, owned, and operated by the communities themselves. These schools, first established in the mid-1990s, responded to an unmet demand, as more and more children had failed to gain access to conventional schools.

In Zambia teachers are seen as playing an important role in ensuring the quality of education. Thus, the pupil-teacher ratio has been used as a proxy indicator to track performance in the area of quality. The drop in the pupil-teacher ratios (see table 1) resulted from teacher recruitment and deployment exercises, which saw 4,578 teachers recruited in 2006, 10,600 teach-
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TABLE 1
Average Pupil-Teacher Ratios in Zambia, 2005–8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades 1–4</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 5–7</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 8–9</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 10–12</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ers in 2007, and 5,000 in 2008. The government committed to recruit an additional 5,000 teachers in 2009, which will further reduce the pupil-teacher ratio.

Prior to 2004, the Ministry of Education was not given the authority to replace or recruit teachers due to the employment freeze enacted by the government as it strove to achieve the benchmarks set forth under the IMF’s Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) program. Zambia enrolled in the HIPC program, despite the initiative’s unfavorable conditionalities, in order to try and catch the carrot of debt forgiveness that was dangled in front of the impoverished countries.

The irony of this incentive was that recipient countries were mandated to channel the alleged savings from debt forgiveness into social sectors such as education by both the multilateral and bilateral agencies. How can an impoverished country such as Zambia, which was failing to service the debt in the first place, be expected to declare savings from debt forgiveness and then channel it to the social sector? I thought it only logical to expect one to give only what one has. It beats me how one is expected to give from what one does not have in the first place.

Despite these conditions, Zambia’s Ministry of Education recruited over 30,000 teachers between 2004 and 2008 to improve the quality of education. This included both replacement teachers and net recruitments. The government’s commitment meant that there could be an increase of more than 8 percent in school enrollments during this period. This certainly improved the access to, and quality of, education and provided better support to orphans and vulnerable children.

DAVID ARCHER

The last decade has seen some significant progress in access to primary education, perhaps most dramatically where governments have abolished user fees. Aid donors played some part in spreading this practice, though in many cases it was governments taking the initiative at key political moments or for electoral gains. The pressure put on the World Bank in the closing days of the Clinton administration played some role—forcing them to move away from supporting user fees. However, significant costs remain for many parents
who want to send their children to school, and the right to education remains systematically violated in many countries—as even primary schooling is far from free. Donors have done little to follow through on this issue.

The FTI has played a positive role in some contexts, harmonizing donor efforts behind a national education sector plan. This has reduced transaction costs for governments and in some cases improved the quality of planning. However, plans have been overly focused on primary schooling, and the FTI has probably undermined investment in other EFA areas, most notably adult literacy (“the most neglected goal”) and early childhood care and education. While on paper FTI has a strong country-level process, involving the government, donors, and civil society, in practice there is little enforcement of this. Civil society rarely has a significant voice.

There have also been serious problems with the disbursement of FTI funds, mostly owing to the World Bank imposing fiduciary and procurement conditions, which sometimes contradict the spirit of FTI and the principles of aid effectiveness agreed to in Paris and Accra. Most important, the FTI lacks the political clout and ambition to seriously address the resource gaps—and so has failed to deliver on the Dakar promise. There is thus a strong case for the development of a global fund for EFA—evolving out of FTI—to reenergize global efforts. The next year is critical if all children are to complete primary schooling by 2015. There is some hope of huge international attention to education in 2010 through the partnership of the Global Campaign for Education with FIFA (International Federation of Association Football), the world football body. Billions of people should hear the call for 1 GOAL: Education for All at the World Cup in South Africa.

Recently the global shortage of teachers has received increased attention—with the figure of 18 million teachers needed by 2015 now widely quoted. Unfortunately, the scale of this challenge seems to overwhelm some people and has accelerated the spread of low-cost labor solutions such as the use of para-teachers. This is likely to do serious damage to the quality of education and the coherence of the teaching profession. The FTI indicative benchmark on teacher salaries has not helped and is widely contested. Indeed, only a small part of FTI funding pays for what governments really need, which is more trained teachers.

But there is a deeper problem: the lack of serious engagement by international donors with finance ministries. In reality, ministries of finance, and not ministries of education, set education budgets. The former pay little attention to teacher shortages or quality education and are dominated by the need to achieve macroeconomic stability in line with IMF conditions. Even where countries do not take loans, the IMF remains hugely influential. Their short-term thinking (3–5 years) undermines the case for investing in basic education, which has long-term returns. Unnecessarily restrictive inflation and deficit targets hold down spending on education. The IMF also
directly imposed public sector wage bill caps on many countries until 2007 when it reversed its decision owing to the devastating evidence of negative impacts on the recruitment of teachers and health workers. The reempowering of the IMF by the recent G20 meeting will be very bad news for education spending and aid unless the standard package of IMF conditions is removed. Low-income countries need to be supported to adopt expansionary measures in response to the current recession. Spending on education, especially on teachers, should be seen as sound short- and long-term investments.

FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION

KAREN MUNDY

What would it take to achieve an integrated approach to EFA—one that is based on the notion that access to good quality basic education is a fundamental human right? It is a complicated question. The EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) tells us that aid to education remains fragmented, poorly targeted to need, and limited in volume and reliability. In addition, Gene Sperling tells us that the mechanism devised to address these problems—the FTI—has largely failed. He argues for the development of a new global fund for education, as a way both of mobilizing resources and providing longer-term, predictable access to funding, especially for countries affected by conflict. But is the creation of a global fund for education, independent of the World Bank, really the solution?

A brief reflection on experiences in the health sector may help answer this question. First, we know that development financing for health has increased rapidly since 2000, more rapidly than in education, in part because of the well-targeted campaigns for specific diseases launched by new global funds. But the underlying dynamic of health sector aid is extremely troubling. As with basic education, most of the increases in development health aid are provided by a small set of OECD countries. In some cases, the new global funds have contributed to disinvestment in other important health issues, while their management has had mixed effects on national capacity to administer public health systems. And like the FTI, global health aid tends to work with the most able governments, not the governments that serve the neediest populations. Increases in health sector aid have not been matched by consistent improvements in governmental prioritization of health in national budgets. As a result, several recent initiatives are exploring an integrated, effective global platform for ensuring global health for all.

Drawing on this experience, we may conclude that a global fund for education has a good chance of mobilizing greater resources. This is important, since education sector funding has stagnated. But I have profound doubts that such a fund on its own can tame the problems that Sperling
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describes. It will not address the problem of ensuring educational services to children whose governments lack basic capacities, and incentives, to deliver education for the poor and marginalized. It may create new problems. If launched primarily through a U.S. initiative, it may displace other donors. If it creates a “master bureaucracy” for EFA in the metropoles of the West, it may defeat the principle of country-led development. If promoted this year, it may undermine efforts to replenish the current FTI set to occur by 2010. And, more broadly, is an expanded vertical fund in education going to undermine the important linkages we know are required between the interdependent fields of education, health, and social protection?

Instead, I want to promote two ideas. First, we should work as hard as we can, right now, to ensure that we monitor and promote government spending on education and aid to education, whether we reside in the North or the South. Aid to basic education and national allocations to education are likely to be disproportionately affected by the current financial downturn. We need to use every bit of media and rhetoric we can to halt any backsliding. The financial crisis is also likely to dilute aid to the poorest countries in favor of countries that are geopolitical favorites (a trend particularly pronounced in the United States and Canada). We have been slow to express our outrage about this trend. The good news is that preliminary data from the OECD-DAC describe 2008 as a bumper year for aid, which rose 10.2 percent in real terms over 2007. Furthermore, there is a strong push from organizations like the World Bank for countercyclical financing of education. But the argument for countercyclical financing is going to need a much stronger push.

Second, instead of jumping on board a new global fund platform, we should call for a high-level process to weigh alternatives for improving the current aid architecture in education, with a global fund as one among several options. Such a process must combine better information, broader sustained debate, and significant political buy in and leadership. We need a sustained opportunity for debate and generative problem solving. A high-level panel, supported perhaps by a team of analysts from the GMR and the FTI, combined with a civil society process, might tackle these questions. Such a panel must separate the immediate and urgent problem of raising funds for the FTI, from the longer-term question of how to create a mechanism that frames aid to education as the fulfillment of international legal duties—to education as a right.

For this process, we need (as Sperling and the GMR point out) much better information. We do not know enough about global and regional funding gaps, what northern governments’ “fair share” of that gap is, and how recipient governments are responding to these gaps. The EFA Global Monitoring Report has done a terrific job of monitoring the advancement of EFA at the global scale. But its mandate has not reached to the country level, where there is an enormous need for independent analysis of the funding
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gap for basic education and for more careful tracking of public expenditures in education for their poverty effects. The World Bank provides better information about these gaps, but given its conservatism, it rarely links such information to an aspirational agenda for changes in global aid architecture. Instead, Bank analysis is consistently directed at finding alternative finance sources within national boundaries. UNESCO, through its High-Level Working Group process, has failed to play the coordinating and analytic roles we might expect of it, while the Global Campaign for Education has only a rudimentary analytic capacity at the country level. As a result, we have no organization or entity that prepares clear analysis of alternative approaches to the issue of financing for basic education. Should we advocate that our governments focus resources on a smaller or a larger number of countries? Use budget support over sector financing? Focus aid on good performers or aid orphans? Push for some type of global currency tax or other innovative form of funding? These are questions that need answers.

Several years ago, when FTI was established, a heated debate emerged among Canadian civil society organizations, whose members objected to the Global Campaign for Education’s endorsement of the FTI’s location in the World Bank. At that time, the group was told that this was “the only train leaving the station.” The recent collapse of international efforts to create an education finance facility for transition states outside the World Bank suggests that the Bank may again turn out to be “the only train” capable of managing a global compact in education. If such is the case, we need to ensure that strong, sustained analytical and challenge functions exist outside the Bank.

Thus, we should focus our energies on one proximate and one longer-term goal. Let us work, at the national level, in our own countries, to ensure that basic education remains a foreign policy priority (in the North) and a domestic priority (in the South). At the same time, we need to demand from our leaders a global process that creates a vehicle worthy of our shared EFA aspirations. Let us not rush forward, only to catch a new train to the wrong station.

DAVID WIKING

When reading through the different interventions, three issues strike me as triggers for success or failure in reaching the EFA goals or any other related educational target. First, achieving EFA will require additional funds, and the donor community will need to provide a considerable proportion of those funds. Second, the way funds are handled and disbursed by the donor community (including the Breton Woods institutions) is becoming a general concern and must become smoother and more harmonized with processes of improving national financial management systems. Third (perhaps the most neglected issue by the other interventions), the desired outcome of
education is largely dependent on what governments decide: the legislative framework, the size of the education budget, equity in access, pedagogical approaches, and so forth.

The importance of donors living up to aid commitments is paramount. So too is the way aid, or development cooperation, is designed and delivered. Felix Phiri’s remark about HIPC speaks for itself, and we are all aware of FTI’s shortcomings. As a representative of the donor community—albeit a donor that commits 1 percent of our gross national income to development cooperation and who is committed to the aid effectiveness agenda—I feel very uncomfortable with the way that donors and the international aid architecture have failed to live up to commitments in terms of volume and aid effectiveness. This must change.

As in this discussion, we sometimes omit the importance of how cooperating partner governments act—maybe because we are worried that it may provide an excuse for donors to focus less on their own commitments. That is, in my view, a mistake. Although more funds for education are necessary, more funds used in the wrong way will not contribute to achieving EFA results. To be frank, sometimes a ministry of education in an authoritarian state is as much a part of the problem as part of the solution.

In my view the main objective of an education system is to provide learners with the skills and knowledge that are needed for the society in which they live. But education is also about fostering a democratic culture—a necessary element for any democratic society. If children are taught not to respect one another, that some people are more important than others, or that it is acceptable to disregard the views of others—or future generations—then these attitudes are likely to impact the society in which those children grow up. The foundations of education are, thus, highly political. This dimension is often neglected in the discussion around international aid to education. By ignoring the political importance of education I think we make the case for education less appealing to senior decision makers.

Governments must be responsible for designing their own educational policy and education sector plans. Far too often such plans are produced by a few people from the ministry of education, together with experts provided by the World Bank and/or other international cooperation agencies. But how often are the appropriate parliamentary oversight committees invited into the process? Or representatives of civil society? Only by involving a broader spectrum of society can education move from being mainly a technical matter to being a fundamental question of citizenship and social development, of concern to all citizens.

Karen Mundy, in her very insightful contribution, reminds us that we should not rush forward “only to take a new train to the wrong station.” In finding the right train in the complex aid architecture, the donor community
needs to be more strategic and improve at contextualizing the role of aid for development. And the answer is not likely to be “more of the same.”

Personally, I think it best to avoid the creation of a new vertical fund. I would rather see new and old funders, partner countries, and civil society collectively renew their commitment to quality education for all—not for some or for most. Although there are many reasons why the FTI needs to reform and evolve, the principles upon which the FTI is built can well serve such a renewed commitment.

STEPHEN MOSELEY

The story reported by Felix Phiri from Zambia is heartening as it exemplifies the country’s commitment to EFA and collaborative efforts by funders, NGOs, and others working together at the country level to address the critical need for enhanced access and quality of education.

There are similar success stories in Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Namibia) and many other places (e.g., Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Jordan, and Morocco). More than halfway to 2015, we now know that the EFA goals are possible to achieve, but to do so involves higher levels of funding assistance from the developed nations and continued and even increased investment within countries themselves. While recognizing the potential of alternative mechanisms like a global fund for education, I believe we must now focus on obtaining the necessary funding and on enhancing existing mechanisms so that we keep moving forward with the kind of alacrity and commitment discussed by our Zambian colleague.

Recently, President Obama announced extraordinary new commitments—or initiatives—for global health and food security. In both instances, he described them as collaborative efforts both across, and within, countries in which funding commitments—not just pledges—are made to achieve the goal of significantly enhanced health and food security. He did not call for new funding mechanisms but rather for significant increases in commitments, stronger interagency collaboration, and greater capacity-building efforts within countries. He said that U.S. leadership for these two initiatives should build on its technical expertise, years of experience, and new resolve to increase funding levels (in the area of health this meant an additional $12 billion to the $50 billion previously committed for HIV/AIDS).

The education development community in the United States—including, among others, university-based scholars, the Basic Education Coalition, the Global Campaign for Education, and the Center for Universal Education—should join together to advocate for such a presidential initiative in education. Building on past achievements in primary education access and quality, we also need to secure funding to support the transition of children into secondary education and for livelihood preparation and technical workforce
development beyond secondary education. Moreover, we must also commit to overcome the past neglect of critical EFA goals. This means early childhood education; adult literacy opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults; enhanced methods of testing, monitoring, and evaluation; improved information management systems that deliver resources to the most needed areas; teacher education development; and, finally, the use of low-cost, affordable technologies—digital and otherwise—that contribute to student learning, teacher preparation, and the administration and management of educational reforms. Existing organizational mechanisms at the international, regional, and country levels should be enhanced and made more flexible, to ensure that they not only address the EFA goals but also situations of crisis where governments have failed to provide access to basic education for a whole generation of children.

In addition to increased funding, several other reforms should be advocated. First, the World Bank must provide greater flexibility to the FTI as it assists governments to establish sound, long-term EFA plans. Second, multilateral institutions like UNESCO and UNICEF should work in concert with international NGOs that have expertise in education and relief in crisis situations, to ensure that a common international fund is available to support children’s educational needs during periods of crisis and emergency. Third, advocacy work depends on solid knowledge and evidence. Technical service organizations, NGOs, universities, and international government agencies need to develop collaborative mechanisms that contribute to the accumulation of research, advocacy, and knowledge. The results of such collaboration should enhance work at all levels—local, regional, and country—by maximizing available and future resources. This effort should include enhancing the capacity of the EFA Global Monitoring Report and finding ways to effectively implement its key messages at UNESCO-convened groups so that country commitments and newly gained knowledge are brought back to the country level.

Already there is significant collaboration within countries under the leadership of ministries of education with organizations such as AED and the 18 members of the Basic Education Coalition, which work locally to collaborate with their counterparts in country institutions. Most important, further steps are needed to institutionalize the kind of technical capacity that private independent organizations have developed so as to enable government ministries and local citizen groups to sustain such capacities in the future.

Undoubtedly the current global recession will have a long recovery period. Resources must be mobilized today to sustain past educational progress—for example, by addressing the decline of teacher compensation and by attracting new teachers and ensuring that existing qualified teachers do not leave the system. Today common educational challenges are recognized worldwide by country leaders, donor institutions, and the NGO community.
We can ill afford to squander past achievements and momentum as the global economy begins its slow recovery.

Collaboration, cooperation, a business plan, and commitments, including significant global leadership by the United States, should be the next steps for EFA. The extraordinary alignment of leadership today in Congress, the State Department, and the White House should be supported and mobilized to move global educational initiatives forward. Now is the moment to act!

LIESBET STEER

A recent study commissioned by the Hewlett Foundation into external financing for basic education aims to answer the question of why, despite the rhetoric of strong political support to basic education, the sector has been unable to attract more donor funds. The study is based on a literature review and extensive fieldwork with bilateral, multilateral, non-DAC donors, NGOs, and foundations, as well as two country case studies in Uganda and Mali.

The study identifies six key factors influencing donor decisions to finance basic education: donor prioritization and leadership, aid architecture, donor organization and capacity, evidence and advocacy, partner absorptive capacity, and partner demand for external financing. In terms of relative importance, prioritization and leadership, evidence and advocacy, and the aid architecture seem to be the areas presenting the strongest limitations to the scale-up of financing for basic education, followed by recipient demand, partner absorptive capacity, and donor capacity and organization. Interestingly, partner absorptive capacity featured much less strongly than might have been expected given the attention the issue receives in the aid literature. Examples of more specific findings are as follows:

- Strong interest of top leadership in basic education has been a critical driver in a number of organizations, but prioritization can also be influenced by other factors, such as a “visionary” paper like the Delors report, a country’s own development or religious background, or foreign policy considerations. However, decentralization and disaggregation of aid agencies have made it more difficult to implement central priorities, even when there is high-level political commitment.
- Improvements in aid effectiveness—in particular, coordination and alignment—were noted, but the sector lacks opportunities (and incentives) for donor partnerships, and international coordination is weak. Insufficient attention has been given to developing innovative approaches to financing or engaging non-DAC donors and the private sector. The reduced availability of education experts, due to restructuring and use of new aid modalities, was also noted as a limiting factor.
- The basic education community has not been sufficiently effective in measuring results and impact, in particular with respect to broader
development impact of basic education. Greater clarity and coherence around quantity and quality measures are also needed. Education advocacy faces strong competition from more aggressive, evidence-based, and high-level advocacy campaigns in other sectors.

- Demand for basic education support seems strong, but it is perceived differently across donor agencies (reflecting prioritization and aid instruments), and there are signs of a shift toward demand for higher-level education support in countries where relatively good progress in basic education has been made (e.g., Uganda).
- The donor community lacks the tools to effectively address local capacity constraints and often exacerbates them with its practices.

Several developments in 2010 may offer opportunities to mobilize substantial new resources—for example, the 1 GOAL Campaign, the FTI replenishment, and the U.S. proposal for a global fund for education. The key challenge will be to make the most of these opportunities by developing a strong evidence-based case for increased resources for basic education in spite of the difficult financial circumstances affecting all donor countries.

Capturing the global stage. There is a need to capture support among high-level political, popular, and/or corporate leaders. This could occur by identifying a core group of global champions (academics, political and business leaders) who could be the driving force behind a global effort.

Making a case for education. The sector could make better use of existing evidence. One suggestion is to develop a renewed “visionary paper,” which would provide a powerful case for increased investment in basic education by demonstrating its importance to contemporary challenges, such as, for example, climate change. Major reports, such as the Brundtland Commission report on the environment, the Stern report on climate change, and the earlier Delors report on education, have made a real difference. A semi-permanent body to provide rigorous economic and social analysis of the education sector on a rolling basis could also potentially strengthen education’s position in the international arena. Finally, it is essential to develop more coherent messages about the importance of quantity and quality of education and the relative importance of primary, basic, and secondary education.

Expanding the tent: new partners and approaches. The education sector could benefit from broadening its community in three ways. First, opportunities to use innovative financing mechanisms should be further explored. The FTI, the exploration of options for funding education in fragile states, and work on the application of results-based aid in education are steps in the right direction. A review of the possible application of health financing mechanisms would be useful. Second, there is a need to reach out to nontraditional donors and foundations, which have, thus far, not significantly invested in education. Finally, the potential role of the private sector in the financing and provision of basic education should be reviewed.
MODERATED DISCUSSION

Enhancing effectiveness of aid delivery. The education sector should build more strongly on country-level progress in terms of coordination through a strong global platform. One option would be to strengthen the UNESCO High-Level Group on EFA by setting up a smaller commission involving high-level and political leaders. Greater opportunities for donors to enter collaborative partnerships are also needed.

Strengthening recipient capacity and demand. Donors need to improve the coordination of technical support and address gaps in technical expertise across the donor community. There is also an urgent need to develop more systemic approaches to building capacity within local governments through institutional development and system-wide reform. The survey also noted a need to strengthen local government and nongovernment accountability mechanisms that can create pressure and demand for the high-quality delivery of education services.

DAVID ARCHER

The 1 GOAL campaign presents an excellent opportunity to place education higher up the policy agenda in 2010—influencing both national governments to increase domestic spending and international donors to live up to their aid promises. The partnership between the Class of 2015 and the world football body, FIFA, coordinated by the Global Campaign for Education, is already arousing mass interest. A U.K. launch at Wembley in August with Queen Rania and Gary Lineker attracted good coverage, and the global media launch on October 6, 2009, is likely to include presidents Zuma, Lula, and Sarkozy, as well as Gordon Brown and a stellar array of world footballers. It is expected that, by the end of the World Cup finals in July 2010, over 3 billion people will have seen the call for “1 Goal: Education for All” and that 30 million people will sign petitions calling on their leaders to increase financing for EFA. The intention is to harmonize efforts so that heads of state make serious financial commitments at the UN summit in New York in September 2010—2 months after the World Cup has ended.

The precise messaging behind 1 GOAL is being refined, but the broad points are clear. It will highlight that today 75 million children around the world are denied the chance to go to school and that, unable to read or write, they face a lifetime of poverty. It will contest that the world does not have to be this way: progress can and has been made with 40 million more children in school today as compared to 2000. A key concept will be that “Education Beats Poverty” (reduced to “Education 1–Poverty 0”). Perhaps the key message is then that delivering quality education needs more resources from both national governments and donors. The aim is to leave a positive social legacy from the largest sporting event ever in Africa.

These top-line messages should contribute to mobilizing mass political
support behind new investments in education. More detailed demands are also being defined (by an NGO called the Global Campaign for Education) for developing and developed countries in order to clarify and harmonize efforts behind the EFA goals:

Leaders of developing countries will be called upon to spend 20 percent of national budgets on education (and at least half of this on primary education), to discontinue user fees, and to bring down class sizes by recruiting more professional teachers.

Leaders of developed countries will be called upon to provide their fair share of the estimated $16 billion per year needed in external financing to achieve EFA. They will be urged to work together to build an effective global education initiative, ensuring that their aid is predictable so that it can be spent on priorities such as more trained teachers. They will also be urged to extend their aid to the countries in greatest need, including those that are fragile or affected by conflict.

The political momentum and demands generated from 1 GOAL could make the difference in securing a breakthrough in both domestic investment and increased aid to education. Whether it leads to a greater likelihood of a global fund for EFA is difficult to predict. World leaders may find announcing a global education fund an easy way to be seen as responding to worldwide public demand. The challenge will be to hold them to delivering that in practice once the glare of publicity has passed. One of pressure generated by 1 GOAL may help, but it will not be enough to ensure that a new global fund is designed effectively. For that we need to depend on lessons learned from the successes and challenges of FTI. The forthcoming evaluation of FTI must be used as a key reference point in shaping whatever comes next. Lobbying for this will need to be sustained behind the scenes: it is much less glamorous than the public campaigning around 1 GOAL but equally important if real progress on EFA is to occur.

PARTICIPANTS

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