

Back to School Time — But Not if You're a Girl in Mali

There are 34.7 million elementary school children in the U.S. getting ready to go back to school in August and September.¹ But around the world, the reality is that nearly double that number — 67 million — won't go to school at all; the majority of these children are girls. Unless more effective policies are implemented and there is greater international support, 72 million children may still be out of school by 2015 — more than in 2008. Millions more will receive a poor-quality education and not be able to read, write, or count. We must do our part to ensure the poorest and hardest-to-reach children — especially girls — can go to school and learn.

In the midst of debates on the national debt and budget slashing scenarios, it is increasingly clear that making the most of every dollar is critical—including smart investments in high-impact foreign aid like educating girls. It is also clear that slashing poverty-focused aid is not a solution; cutting these programs will not meaningfully impact the deficit and will undermine long-term international security and economic stability. The focus now must be to identify and support the priorities and programs that give us the most powerful return on our investment, and getting girls into school has one of the biggest returns for our dollar. Investing in the innovative and effective Education For All – Fast Track Initiative is an effective way to help ensure all girls around the world receive the quality education they deserve.

Investing in Girls' Education is the Smart Choice

There is no single development intervention that can so radically and comprehensively change the trajectory of a girl's life — and future generations — as education. Educating girls has been shown to reduce their risk of HIV/AIDS and mitigate its impact, improve the health of women and their children, alleviate extreme poverty, delay early marriage, reduce female genital cutting, and increase girls' self-confidence and decision-making power.² And while primary education is critical, the full benefits are realized when girls continue through middle and high school. On average, for a girl in a poor country, each additional year of education beyond grades three or four will lead to 20 percent higher wages and a 10 percent decrease in the risk of her own children dying of preventable causes.³ Women with six or more years of education are more likely to seek prenatal care, assisted childbirth, and postnatal care, reducing the risk of maternal and child mortality and illness. Educating women of reproductive age is credited with reducing child mortality by an astonishing 50 percent since 1970.

Despite the enormous benefits and return on investment of educating girls, too few girls are making it to — and even fewer through — secondary school. A recently released, groundbreaking report by RESULTS Educational Fund and the Global Campaign for Education, *Make it Right: Ending the Crisis in Girls' Education*, highlights the legal and policy reforms, and the resources needed to guarantee the right to education, especially for girls. The report finds that in 47 out of 54 African countries, girls have less than a 50 percent chance of going to secondary school. As USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah put it even more starkly: A woman in South Sudan is more likely to die in childbirth than finish high school. A girl born in

¹ National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=65>

² UNFPA. Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis. Available at: <http://www.unfpa.org/hiv/women/report/chapter5.html>.

³ "What Works in Girls' Education." Barbara Herz and Gene B. Sperling, Senior Fellow for Economic Policy and Director of the Center for Universal Education, April 2004. http://www.cfr.org/publication/6947/what_works_in_girls_education.html

Chad is only 10 percent more likely to learn how to read than she is to die before she turns five years old.⁴

How to Invest Effectively in Girls' Education: The Fast Track Initiative

Despite the urgent need to ensure girls enter and complete secondary school, the recently released USAID education strategy notes that USAID will withdraw funding and deemphasize support for secondary education. While this policy shift is disturbing, it only further underscores the clear rationale to invest some of our education money in the Education for All – Fast Track Initiative (FTI), which supports girls' secondary school programs.

The FTI is a global partnership of donors and developing countries, multilateral institutions, private foundations and companies, and civil society organizations that aims to ensure that all children receive a quality basic education. To date, FTI has supported 45 low-income countries, including Afghanistan and 24 African countries. Between 2004 and 2008, the number of children enrolled in school in FTI-supported countries in Africa went up 50 percent, compared to 27 percent in African countries without FTI support.

The FTI means good development based on the principle of mutual accountability: In exchange for technical support and additional funding, recipients must ensure sufficient domestic commitment of financial and political resources, strong national education plans, as well as transparent budgeting and sound monitoring for outcomes. FTI countries increased their **domestic expenditures** for primary education by six to nine percent per year between 2000 and 2005, higher on average than their economic growth. The FTI has been cited by the G-8 as a model of aid effectiveness. It is evidence-based and has taken the lead in developing a Results Framework to define and set clear and measurable targets in access and learning.

The FTI has a strong track record of progress on girls' education. More than two-thirds of girls completed the last grade of primary school in all FTI countries in 2008, compared with only 52 percent in 2000. In 29 of the 38 FTI partner countries for which gender data exist, the number of girls enrolled in primary school more than doubled between 2000 and 2008. In addition, the gender gap in primary school completion was reduced or closed in many countries. This improvement was significant in Bhutan, Djibouti, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Guinea, Nepal, Rwanda, and Senegal.

What Will an Investment in FTI Achieve over the Next Three Years?

For every additional \$1 million invested in FTI:

- 74 new classrooms will be constructed,
- 8,000 more children will enter primary school,
- 500,000 textbooks will be distributed, or
- 1,000 teachers will receive a year of training

Yet the FTI receives more requests for funding support for national education plans than it can fulfill. The FTI's success — and the fact that it is the only multilateral partnership for Education for All — is placing new burdens on its ability to support countries with approved national education plans. That gap threatens not only children's futures, but the recovery of many nations from decades of conflict. Half of the 67 million out-of-school children live on fragile and post-conflict states, with a growing number of them FTI-eligible.⁵ This population of children creates unprecedented opportunities, but also new

⁴ Remarks by USAID Administrator Dr. Rajiv Shah, David E. Barmes Global Health Lecture National Institutes of Health. February 15, 2011

⁵ Of the 45 developing country members, 12 are fragile states. Another 15 fragile and post-conflict countries are eligible, and it is likely most of them will become FTI members by 2012.

demands for FTI funding to help countries bridge the gaps.

November FTI Replenishment Conference: A Chance to Make it Right

It is finally time for the U.S. to make its first-ever contribution to the FTI.

The United States, despite being a voting member of the Board of Directors, has never contributed to the FTI to support grants for worthy national education plans; as a result, tiny Romania gives more to the FTI than the U.S.

The FTI is asking donors to make three-year pledges totaling \$2.5 billion at the first-ever FTI replenishment conference in Copenhagen, November 6-7 of this year. The FTI and civil society are urging the U.S. to make a three-year, \$375 million pledge — just 15 percent of the \$2.5 billion donor request. This U.S. commitment would be leveraged five- or six-fold with other donors and many times more with domestic resources by FTI countries.

Global Support for the FTI

The FTI is increasingly viewed as *the* global partnership for education.

In its recent Multilateral Aid Review, the UK Department for International Development (DfID) rated FTI as “good value for money” and stated that it will continue to fund the FTI because the FTI is the only multilateral that focuses solely on achieving the education Millennium Development Goals, concentrates its resources on the poorest countries and on fragile states, and makes a significant contribution to education policy at the national and global level. In his recent report *Education for All: Beating Poverty, Unlocking Prosperity*, former UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown asserted that the limited support and resources that FTI has received in comparison to the global funds for health “represents a wasted opportunity” since the FTI directly links aid to national plans and “provides donors with an opportunity to pool resources, thereby lowering transaction costs, and harmonizing their efforts to support national plans.”

Brown and others have expressed support for the FTI’s improved leadership and a reformed governance system that gives developing countries and civil society a greater voice, and, most importantly, a capacity to support programs that deliver results.

There also is growing support in Congress for investing in the FTI. Reps. Nita Lowey (D-NY), ranking member on the House State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee of Appropriations (which oversees the annual foreign aid budget), and Dave Reichert (R-WA) introduced the bipartisan Education for All Act of 2011, which calls on the U.S. to support a multilateral education initiative, like the Fast Track Initiative. In the fiscal year 2011 Foreign Operations appropriations bills (which were not enacted because of a larger continuing resolution deal), both the House and Senate carved out funding for the FTI as a part of the basic education budget. The fiscal year 2012 House State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill authorizes the U.S. to allocate a portion of the overall basic education funding to the FTI, and in her public statement on this bill, ranking member Lowey clearly stated her support for a U.S. contribution to FTI. Lowey cited that an FTI investment “will allow the U.S. to leverage funds from across other donors to multiply the impact of each U.S. dollar spent to increase access to basic education.”

We Can’t Balance Our Budget by Slashing Global Education Programs

When we look at the numbers, slashing global poverty programs won’t make a dent in the deficit. Most Americans think the U.S. spends a quarter of its budget on development assistance — but it’s really **less than one percent**. In fact, based on that assumption, most Americans would be happy to “cut” foreign aid to seven to 10 percent of the budget. While slashing these effective investments won’t do anything meaningful for our national deficit, it would have a tragic impact on these life-improving and life-savings programs.

To reiterate: just one percent of the U.S. budget goes to health, education and other programs that save lives, reduce poverty, ensure futures, and build stable nations and healthy economies; supporting countries that can buy our products, help grow our economy, and be our allies. As the National Security Advisory Council Co-Chairs wrote in their own letter to Congress, "At just over one percent of federal spending, the International Affairs Budget is a huge return on our investment."

Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) just last month responded to a young constituent's criticism of foreign funding with the following:

"I will tell you that the real problem in America's spending is not foreign aid. Sometimes in the press and in the minds of many, our foreign aid is exaggerated; it really is a miniscule part of our overall budget and it's not the reason we have this growing debt in America...Foreign aid is important; if it's done right, it spreads America's influence around the world in a positive way. These are our allies that in the future can help us, not just in political struggles but who can be our partners in economic trade. A world where people are prosperous and free to grow their economies and pursue their own dreams and ambitions is a better world for all of us."