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Dutch commitment to basic education: living up to promises

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Dutch commitment to Basic Education: Living up to Promises

By Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Strong political and public support

‘ Accessible, good quality education for all, both boys and girls, is so crucial for poverty reduction and sustainable economic, political and social development that the Netherlands must spend 15 % of Official Development Aid (ODA) on basic education by 2005.’ A motion on basic education in developing countries, adopted by the Dutch Parliament in 2002, has triggered a steady growth of the expenditures on education in recent years. The government has committed itself to reach this 15 % target by ultimately 2007. Strong public and political support for development co-operation in general and serious commitment to the EFA Goals and Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3 in particular, have reinforced the trend in priority setting on basic education for all, which started in 1990 after the adoption of the World Declaration on Education in Jomtien.

The 15 % target is a direct and concrete answer to the promises that were made in Dakar and Monterrey. By using this target, expenditures for education can increase even without a raise of the total ODA budget, which has been fixed at 0,8 % of GNP.

In line with these promises is the active Dutch involvement in the Fast Track Initiative partnership, set up to accelerate progress towards to the achievement by 2015 of universal primary completion, for both boys and girls, according to MDG 2 and 3.

Modest increases in bilateral and multilateral aid flows for education in the first half of this decade are a point of serious concern for the Dutch Government. The considerable financing gap between the estimated investment needed and the real commitments and missing the MDG target to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 are two good reasons to stay alert. Dutch minister for Development Co-operation will keep urging bilateral and multilateral donors to live up to their promises and prevent EFA from getting seriously ‘off track’.

How Dutch policy evolved

Dutch policy on basic education is based on the international agreements made at the World Conferences in Jomtien and Dakar. This includes being able not only to attend, but also finish, school. So quality of education, as well as universal access to education and completion, are important focus areas for preventing young people leaving school early. Therefore Dutch policy has the following objectives:

- Maintaining and improving the quality and relevance of basis education;
- Providing equal opportunities for people, especially for disadvantaged groups so that they can participate in education,
- Eliminating gender disparities in participation in education and promoting fair gender relations in society

As Dutch bilateral co-operation works via a sector wide approach with formal primary education as the main priority, there is also special attention for supporting important sub sectors which were neglected in the past. These include childhood development, vocational

education and training, non-formal education, alternative forms of education for marginal groups, adult education and literacy. This is in line with the outcomes of the Joint Evaluation on External Support to Basic Education (2003).

Making progress towards reaching the EFA goals and MDG's is not only a matter of raising the budget for education. Important tools for progress and quality education are capacity building, addressing the effects of the hiv/aids pandemic, close co-operation with civil society organisations, improving aid effectiveness through the alignment of assistance around development priorities and harmonising donor policies and priorities around country systems.

Dutch Education Spending

Civil society lobby activities and co-operation between the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs, parliament and NGO's over the years has led to substantial increases in the education expenditures. Shortly after Jomtien a EUR 10 million budget became available. The policy priority for Basic Education was strengthened gradually during the nineties leading to higher budgets such as EUR 53 million in 1997, EUR 156 million in 2000 and EUR 198 million in 2003. From EUR 300 million in 2005 and EUR 400 million in 2006 total Dutch expenditure on Basic Education is intended to grow to around EUR 600 million by 2007.

The Dutch budget for higher education in developing countries is presently a little over EUR 130 million; it is not included in the 15 % target.

Dutch education policy is implemented through various channels:

Bilateral support

In 2007 70 % of the total yearly budget for basic education (about EUR 457 million) will be spent through bilateral support, existing of:

- Support to education reform in 16 partner countries*: EUR 270 million;
- Support through Silent Partnerships (which are part of the international agenda on harmonisation and co-ordination): EUR 56 million;
- FTI Catalytic Fund: EUR 82 million. .

As the Catalytic Fund provides bridge funding for a limited period of time additional support has to become available for those countries that still have a financing gap after the CF-funding. This gap needs to be filled up by: 1. New donors; 2. Increased support by present donors; 3. silent partnerships; 4. Opening a second window for CF exit-countries, for which the Netherlands already have made a financial reservation.

- General budget support attribution to education expenditures: EUR 49 million

Multilateral support

In 2007 13% of the basic education budget will be channelled through multilateral organisations : EUR 61 million.

With contributions to UNICEF, ILO, IIEP and others programs in the field of Early Childhood, child labour, hiv/aids and education, education in conflict and post conflict regions and improving the quality of education are supported.

Private sector support and attribution of other sectors to basic education

In 2007 11 % of the basic education budget – about EUR 70 million - is channelled through the private sector: Dutch and international NGO's such as the Global Campaign on Education. Important goals are: intensified co-operation and complementarity between government and civil society in reaching the EFA goals. Dutch embassies in education partner countries encourage civil society to actively participate in education reform processes.

* Dutch education partner countries:

Bangladesh, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India (exit country), Indonesia, Macedonia, Mali, Mozambique, Pakistan (future partner) , South Africa, Suriname, Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen, Zambia