

## In this together?: current UK and international commitments to fund education in developing countries

### Introduction

In 2006 the previous government committed to spend at least £8.5 billion over a ten year period to 2015, with annual expenditure increasing to £1 billion by 2010/11. Over the past few years, the Department for International Development (DfID) has dramatically increased its annual spending on education in line with this commitment, and under the previous government was due to hit £1 billion this year. This commitment to spending has been positive and it is essential the new government maintains previous funding levels set out by DfID to continue to effectively use education to beat poverty.

### What commitments has the UK's newly elected government made to fund education globally?

We have a new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in power, which means we are in the slightly unusual position where two election manifestos are feeding into government policy, and it is a little unpredictable which party's policies will prevail in different areas. The new government recently released a fairly brief document called a 'Programme for Government' outlining their reconciled policies, which gives some guidance, but does not go into a lot of detail.

Within their party manifestos, both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have clearly spelled out their commitment to reaching the United Nations target of spending 0.7 percent of national income as aid. The [Conservatives](#) pledged their commitment to ensuring everyone attains access to education and describe it as their 'duty' to ensure that all aid is spent effectively. The [Liberal Democrats](#) recognise the importance of delivering education programmes as a means to promote 'gender equality, reduce maternal and infant mortality, and restrict the spread of major diseases like HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria.'

In the new coalition's recently published '[Programme for Government](#),' which sets out its policy plans, including on international development, the new government has committed to sustain aid spending and says it will honour the 'commitment to spend 0.7 percent of GNI on overseas aid from 2013, and to enshrine this commitment in law.' The document further outlines support for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and states the government will 'prioritise aid spending on programmes to ensure that everyone has access to clean water, sanitation, healthcare and education.'

While these policy statements are highly encouraging, the new government has not made any specific spending commitments on education in either party manifesto or in the coalition's 'Programme for Government.' We must hold the new government accountable to their previous policy statements on sustaining aid for international development and their broad statements on support for aid to education, to ensure global education for all can be achieved.

## International commitments to fund education globally

In 2000, 164 governments met in Dakar, Senegal and signed the [Framework for Action](#), thereby pledging to achieve 'Education for All' by the year 2015. Developing nations committed to invest in basic education, while rich countries committed to increasing aid and declared that no country should be prevented from reaching this goal due to a lack of funding. Although international spending on education has increased significantly since the 1990s, progress has stalled. If current trends continue, countries will fall short of realising the promises they made in 2000, leaving 56 million primary aged children out of school.

The 2010 [Education for All – Global Monitoring Report](#) estimates an external financing gap of \$16.2 billion for basic education – this is money that must be committed from outside developing countries' domestic budgets. When secondary education is factored in, the funding gap increases to \$25 billion. The report assesses the financing requirements needed to achieve basic education goals. The report finds:

- **Donor countries** need to commit additional aid to close the remaining funding gap. The Global Monitoring Report estimates that donor aid must increase six-fold to achieve 2015 targets. The report finds a collective failure of donor countries to act on the pledge made in Dakar.
- **Developing countries** must improve their education financing by prioritising education and allocating more domestic resources to funding education. In order to do so, countries must strengthen the efficiency and equity of education spending.

The Global Monitoring Report also illustrates that while people living in the world's poorest countries played little role in causing the current economic crisis, they stand to lose the most. The report demonstrates how several major donor countries with poor track records on meeting their commitments to aid have been free-riding on those countries with good funding histories. By adopting collective funding targets, some countries have undermined aid efforts by failing to meet their 'fair share' of the cost.

While the UK and Canada are close to reaching their 'fair share' of the spending target, others are falling short. Germany needs to allocate an additional \$594 million annually. France must spend \$391 million and Japan can only meet its target if it redistributes aid to low income countries and spends an additional \$399 million. The US financing gap stands at \$2.6 billion in additional aid needed to reach its 'fair share' target but the US government has announced real increases that put them on path to achieve financing goals. Italy, on the other hand, has demonstrated a consistent failure to fund global education and has apparently abandoned targets agreed with other G8 and EU countries, citing the financial crisis as an excuse.

If the goals agreed to in Dakar are to be met, donor countries must make a concerted effort to step up funding and mobilize additional aid. For this to happen, international pressure from high-performing countries such as the UK and Canada is essential.