

The Education Fast Track Initiative:

A Global Campaign review of progress,
and recommendations for reform



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Report prepared for ActionAid on behalf of the Global Campaign for Education

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Acronyms

AFT	Analytical Fast Track
DFID	Department for International Development
EFA	Education for All
EI	Education International
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
GCE	Global Campaign for Education
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries
MCA	Millennium Challenge Account
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SCF	Save the Children Fund
SWAp	Sector-wide approach programme
TU	Teachers' union
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UPE	Universal Primary Education
WEF	World Education Forum

Purpose of the study

The report was jointly commissioned by ActionAid and the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) to examine issues around eligibility criteria for country selection, the fast track initiative (FTI) process in relation to involvement and ownership by national governments and civil society, and to investigate the implications of the cost simulations and related indicative benchmarks. The report involved collection and analysis of documents on the FTI, and contacting key stakeholders connected with the GCE, as well as officials of donor agencies. In the process of carrying out the study, it was apparent that key issues related to the FTI were under discussion by donor agencies, and that agreement had not yet been met on a range of issues. As a result, it was evident that there was considerable sensitivity around sharing information and internal documents given concern that this could damage the process. By consequence, it was not possible to gather as much information as intended and, importantly, it was not possible to access information on the FTI Secretariat website based at the World Bank.¹ While attempts were made to contact a wide range of FTI partners (including GCE representatives), it is recognised that it was not possible to obtain the views of all of those who have played an important role in the process to date.

Ideally, a study of this kind would report the status of resource commitments made by FTI partners. However, meetings underway during the process of the research meant that decisions about such commitments were still in a state of flux. Given the speed at which changes were taking place, it is recognised that there is a danger that the report is out of date before it has been written. However, the report provides valuable insights into some of the issues surrounding the process to date, including an examination of how the global initiative has changed since its inception at the 2000 World Education Forum (WEF) at Dakar, together with an analysis of the indicative framework which has been developed subsequently. It is hoped that the analysis will prove useful to the GCE in relation to its commitment to achieving Education for All (EFA) targets by 2015.

All those contacted for the purposes of the study believed that the FTI was a positive step toward achieving the EFA goals and were committed to working towards ensuring that these goals could be met. At the same time, concerns were raised by some people, which they felt would need to be addressed to ensure that the FTI works effectively. The report is written in this spirit – acknowledging the potential of the FTI and the important role it can play in achieving the EFA goals by 2015, while drawing attention to some potential areas that deserve continued attention.

Overview of the development of the FTI, 2000-2003

The FTI has emerged from the commitment that was made at the Dakar World Education Forum (WEF) in 2000 to a global initiative, which would mobilise the additional technical and financial resources needed to accelerate progress towards the Education for All (EFA) goals.² In particular, its aim was to ensure that donors would fulfil their commitment made at the WEF that:

'no countries seriously committed to Education for All will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources.'

Therefore from the outset the global initiative was intended to support good performers in order to accelerate progress, with the hope that this would have a 'demonstration effect', creating stronger incentives for all countries to perform better. This approach was borne out of a recognition that additional resources are by themselves an insufficient condition of progress, in the absence of a sound policy framework (Colclough with Lewin 1992). The motivations for a new global initiative were related to the lack of progress since Jomtien, attributed in part to insufficient donor resources, and a lack of effective coordination of donor efforts. Despite the pledges made, international development assistance to education was found to have declined over the 1990s (although the effect on education was less severe compared with the overall decline in ODA over the decade) (see, for example, Bennell with Furlong 1998; Colclough et al forthcoming; Al-Samarrai 2003). Further impetus to the initiative was provided by the Monterrey Consensus in 2002, at which ministers of finance indicated commitment to substantially increasing ODA.

A subsequent document published by UNESCO (produced in consultation with EFA partners) elaborated upon the global initiative (UNESCO 2001a), presenting it as a process, as much as an instrument for resource mobilisation: 'the global initiative must be understood in a wider development sense, rather than a narrow, financial sense' (UNESCO 2001a, p6).

'Particularly significant is the fact that the initiative is not to be understood as a global fund... the initiative goes beyond financing of EFA to interpreting the principles and specific mechanisms for international cooperation as related to all of the stipulated six elements and their use in achieving EFA. Providing adequate financial resources is but one of the strategies' (UNESCO 2001a, p8).

UNESCO's Global Initiative Framework included six key elements:

- 1** Increasing external finance for education, in particular basic education.
- 2** Ensuring greater predictability in the flow of external assistance.
- 3** Providing earlier, more extensive and broader debt relief and/or debt cancellation for poverty reduction, with a strong commitment to basic education.
- 4** Facilitating donor coordination.
- 5** Strengthening sector-wide approaches.
- 6** Undertaking more effective and regular monitoring of progress towards EFA goals and targets, including periodic assessments. (UNESCO 2001a, p6)

UNESCO has been criticised for not taking action to move towards implementing the global initiative. Both donor agency and GCE representatives expressed their disillusionment with UNESCO, which had not only failed to deliver post-Jomtien, but also was extremely slow in moving forward on the commitments made at Dakar. As a result, it was felt that UNESCO was not providing the necessary support to countries for them to produce credible EFA plans, which was a constraint to their ability to achieve EFA goals. However, UNESCO's weaknesses need to be understood in the light of changes to its financial support occurring since the 1980s (Mundy 1998) which have only improved in recent years. In addition, its ability to mobilise countries to produce EFA plans is constrained by a lack of incentive structure whereas, as will be seen, the linking of FTI proposals with the potential for countries to receive external funding gives the World Bank considerable leverage to ensure that countries do produce plans. While in more recent years some improvements have been evident within UNESCO, it is clear that it will take time for capacity to be built to enable it to undertake the range of activities that are expected of it. Many partners in the FTI process consider that the publication of the Global Monitoring Report (GMR) is a step in the right direction. Continued support for UNESCO from bilateral donors and multilateral agencies will be necessary to ensure that a relatively independent body is available to coordinate activities associated with EFA.

However, most partners in the FTI process believed that UNESCO lacked the capacity – and confidence of key bilateral donors – needed to undertake this coordinating role. This is seen to be potentially one of the major constraints of the initiative, as no other independent body exists to take on this

responsibility. By contrast, the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is perceived by some donors and NGOs to have been more successful than the global initiative in education, in part because the World Health Organisation is in a stronger position than UNESCO to play a lead role and to mobilise donor support. As a result, it is felt that greater consensus has been raised in the health arena – although this might partly be attributed to the narrower remit of the Global Fund, its focus on discrete interventions, and the immediacy and mobilising power of the AIDS pandemic.³ Yet despite these apparent advantages, in practice the Global Fund has had only limited success in mobilising external resources – partly because of donor misgivings about the mechanisms being used. Important lessons can be (and are being) drawn from this experience for the education sector.

Donor and NGO disillusionment at the lack of momentum generated around EFA by UNESCO, post-Dakar, led to a recognition that the World Bank needed to take on a stronger role in uniting major players around a common vision of the global initiative. The World Bank willingly undertook this role.⁴ James Wolfensohn in fact first brought up the idea of a 'fast track' to support free primary education by 2015 at the 2000 Dakar WEF – although this was not initially supported by bilateral donors.⁵ UNESCO itself recognised that a division of labour was needed to achieve progress on EFA, based on the comparative advantage of all partners, and that this would require the World Bank to play an important role in coordinating resource mobilisation (UNESCO 2001a, p8). In the light of more recent developments, it could be argued that the World Bank has been more successful in fulfilling its part of the initiative than have other partners.

The World Bank's proposal for operationalising the global initiative was presented in its 'Action Plan to Accelerate Progress towards Education for All' at the 2002 Spring Development Committee meeting (World Bank 2002m). In its document, the World Bank proposed an EFA 'fast track' in which about 10 countries would be selected by June 2002 'for increased and immediate support, to help generate an early demonstration effect. The fast tracking would be done within the PRSP/CDF framework and implemented through a multi-donor education consortium that would align the external financing needs of these countries with available financial support from donor agencies' (World Bank 2002d, p5). The proposals in the paper received broad agreement from finance ministers present at the meeting (*although some donors, most notably DFID, expressed reservations – see below*).

The World Bank's interpretation of the global initiative seeks to address gaps in data, policy, capacity and financing in particular. It interprets the two key aspects of the FTI as:

- 1** a commitment by developing countries to accelerate efforts to achieve primary education within an indicative framework; and
- 2** a commitment by donors to provide sustained incremental financing (as much as possible on a grant basis), where credible plans to accelerate progress in primary education exist (Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala 2003, p14).

These two aspects are inter-linked since the indicative framework is an attempt to get donors to agree on what counts as 'credible'. However, the lack of agreed criteria for assessing credibility is a major stumbling block in achieving progress in the FTI. While the establishment of indicative benchmarks was an attempt to put forward a set of transparent criteria that can be used consistently, some donors (including those supportive of the FTI) have expressed concerns about their appropriateness, particularly where they feel that they are being used in an overly prescriptive way. The World Bank Action Plan proposed that flexible support strategies should be provided for countries whose policy environment and institutions are too weak or unstable to justify 'full scale' support. 'In these contexts, capacity building, knowledge-sharing, and outreach actions to build support for reform among domestic stakeholders should be the focus of engagement, pending the emergence of conditions that would justify larger resource transfers' (World Bank 2002m, p19).

In general, UNESCO, UNICEF, bilateral donors, NGOs and national governments have supported the broad vision of a global initiative in education. However, a number of concerns have been raised, some of which will be addressed in the sections below. There is a wide range of opinions expressed both in agency documents and by individuals working within agencies concerning the prime purpose of the FTI. For some its main aim is to mobilise external resources, as an accelerated EFA financing modality to fulfil the Dakar pledge, at the same time as ensuring a more efficient use of available resources. Alternatively, it is seen, particularly by some NGOs, as a promising approach to involving civil society in the formulation and implementation of education policy, and of ensuring national ownership. For

others, its prime purpose is to ensure intelligent targeting of aid flows to countries where aid is most needed and will make the biggest impact, as well as to intensify donor coordination at country level. Each of these aspects is reflected in the FTI, although the relative importance of different aspects has changed over time with the first (in relation to mobilisation of external resources) gaining most attention.

Despite its origins in an intergovernmental UN conference, and the important early support of the Netherlands government, the initiative is often referred to as the 'World Bank FTI'.⁶ This raises important questions about ownership – particularly for those (including governments in the South) who are concerned about the impact of previous World Bank structural adjustment programmes on education. The widespread perception that the FTI is a World Bank initiative also raises questions over the extent to which key bilateral donors 'own' the initiative, and are giving it their full political backing. In general, the lack of clarity and agreement over the scope and objectives of the FTI has so far prevented clear decision-making and strong planning from taking place, which is viewed as an important reason for the slow progress that has been made to date. Even if, as anticipated, the FTI's structure and process is further defined at future donor meetings, the FTI is premised on an ambitious shift in the way donors work in education, and this will take time and sustained commitment if it is to happen.

For the Global Campaign for Education, the FTI is seen as the first credible attempt to tackle the global education crisis, but the GCE's NGO and trade union members point out that without additional domestic and external funding it cannot work.

Similarly, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2003) recognises the important role of the World Bank in using its influence in relation to finance authorities in developing countries, who are in a position to ensure that education is given priority in national budgets and development plans. Norway's EFA strategy paper commits the government to helping to fund the FTI, which it considers to be a major educational initiative. It notes that the economic dimension has always been the principal focus of World Bank work and, as such, Norway seeks to promote better integration of the social and political dimensions into the World Bank's activities. In addition, UNESCO considers one of its roles to be ensuring that the FTI's focus on the education Millennium Development Goals does not lead to the broader EFA 'vision' being neglected. Some NGOs have also expressed concerns about the lack of attention to issues of process, participation and ownership, which have bedevilled earlier reform efforts by undermining ownership of reforms and therefore their sustainability. The call by GCE in 2001 to form a caucus of developing country governments and donors, with civil society consultation, to work to develop a governance structure for the global initiative has not received serious attention from bilateral and multilateral agencies (GCE 2001). Some NGOs, especially in the South, are concerned either that the FTI has been moving too fast, or is too much of a 'blueprint' for national governments to take effective ownership of the process. In situations where governments find it hard to say no to the offer of additional external resources, some NGOs and donors have argued that planning processes have been distorted, with governments rushing to complete plans at the expense of a strong planning process that is integrated into a poverty reduction strategy (*see overleaf*).

Donor commitment to the FTI

Despite numerous statements of support for basic education in the decade after Jomtien, only 21% percent of bilateral education aid is estimated to have been allocated to the basic education sub-sector between 1997 and 2000 (Al-Samarrai 2003). Based on high estimates of multilateral assistance to education in addition to bilateral aid, Al-Samarrai (2003) estimates that US\$1.45 billion was available for basic education in 2000, falling far short of the conservative estimate of the external funding gap of US\$2.6 – 5 billion in the low-income countries. Many donor countries have committed themselves to increasing their overall aid budget following the Monterrey Consensus and, within this, to increase the amount spent on education. Current members of the 'FTI partnership' include the World Bank, EU, UNESCO, UNICEF, and 15 bilateral development agencies (Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, Sweden, the UK, and the USA), although the involvement of different agencies varies.⁷ These agencies currently contribute over 90% of bilateral ODA commitments (see *Table 1*).

The 'like-minded donor group' (Finland, Ireland, Norway, the Netherlands, and Sweden) with the exception of the UK (which has qualified its support for the FTI, citing concerns about the process and focus on financing) has generally remained the most enthusiastic group of supporters of the FTI, along with Canada and, more recently, France.⁸ The Netherlands has openly committed itself to contributing 135 million Euros to a financing mechanism which would fit with existing bodies and aid channels, ensuring uniform accountability and monitoring systems on the part of donors

(Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2002). The EU has also been showing its commitment by trying to free up uncommitted EU aid for the initiative. Japan has expressed serious commitment to increasing its aid to basic education through its 'Basic Education for Growth Initiative' (BEGIN), and has recently committed approximately US\$15m over three years to three FTI countries.⁹ The US, on the other hand, has been less involved than other donors – in line with a broadly unilateral approach to education aid and aid more generally,¹⁰ as reflected in the Millennium Challenge Account process (MCA).¹¹ Interestingly, the MCA shares many underlying premises and principles with the FTI, and the reasons for, and implications of, the US pursuing an aid agenda in many respects separate from the Monterrey Consensus deserves attention. Importantly, it suggests that the US is not buying in to donor coordination and harmonisation of procedures, which is potentially detrimental to the countries which most need support – particularly given that the US is one of the major donors to education. Finally, while in general the increased commitment to external support for education (particularly basic education) is laudable, in most cases it will probably not go beyond reversing the downward trend in the 1990s (see *Table 1*).¹²

While FTI donor partners all express commitment in principle to the process, some reservations have been expressed. DFID in particular has raised a number of concerns with the FTI process. It considers that the FTI got off to a bad start by sending out a message that, provided countries had a credible education plan and PRSP, they would get more money:

'The first announcement of the fast track initiative was like a cosmetic presentation and false analysis. It listed the countries where we have made some of the best progress and departments like mine and others have worked very hard: the Ugandas, the Mozambiques, the Rwandas and so on, and then said "We are going to have a World Bank fast track initiative". It was like they were going to have a trust fund, ask for some money, sprinkle it into the reformers and then claim that they had driven forward progress on primary education. That was the initial fast track initiative. We engaged very strongly.'
(DFID 2002c).

DFID is particularly concerned that the problem with a number of the countries selected for the FTI is that they are already 'over-aided.' This view needs to be substantiated by rigorous analysis comparing current aid levels with financing gaps in countries that are considered to be over-aided. Unfortunately, evidence on this is scarce. Nonetheless, DFID has successfully campaigned for an 'Analytical Fast Track' (AFT), as part of the FTI. The AFT is intended to provide interim capacity building support to poor performing countries without credible education plans, thereby shifting for DFID the FTI's emphasis from financing to technical support. So far, the AFT's focus has been on five large population countries

(Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Nigeria and Pakistan), which account for about half of the children out of school. However, DFID has remained concerned that the initiative is placing too much emphasis on countries which are already receiving a lot of aid and are performing well, instead of addressing those which have consistently performed badly (DFID 2002e):

'The Education Fast Track has provided a focus on education and some valuable pressure to ensure that this important goal is reached. However, we remain concerned that the initiative should not attempt to find a quick-fix solution, which will inevitably fail. We need to drive forward progress according to each country's needs and level of commitment to universal primary education...there is great scope for the initiative to incorporate some difficult analytical work which will lead to an improvement in the policy environment for these [high population] countries and which must precede the delivery of extra resources.' Statement by Clare Short and Gordon Brown to Development Committee
(World Bank 2002i).

Table 1: commitments to education of FTI partners

	Total education aid 1997-2000 <i>(2000 US\$m p/a; % total aid)</i>	% allocation to basic education*	% change in total education aid 1990-2000	Future commitments	FTI commitments
Australia	161 23%	20%	+27%	increased aid to basic education to US\$85 million in 2002-03	N/A
Belgium	51 11%	5%	-33%	N/A	Considering support via facility in World Bank
Canada	120 9%	7%	-12%	Providing an additional US\$500 million to basic education	Stated commitment to FTI – support for plans in Tanzania and Mozambique
France	1186 28%	22%	-22%	Significant aid increase currently planned for education	€65m in additional aid for Guinea and Mauritania
Germany	636 17%	12%	-6%	Doubling of education aid budget over 5 years	Stated intention to support 3 countries selected for FTI
Ireland	24 18%	-	+250%	N/A	N/A
Italy	25 4%	1%	-79%	N/A	considering support via facility in World Bank
Japan	952 7%	16%	+2%	US\$2 billion being made available over 5 years	US\$15m over 3 years to Nicaragua, Honduras and Guinea
The Netherlands	147 7%	43%	-21%	Doubling of assistance to basic education	€135m to support the FTI
New Zealand	22 26%	13%	+19%	N/A	N/A
Norway	67 8%	48%	+119%	Increase ODA to 1% of GDP; and increase education share to 15% of total (equivalent to US\$140 million)	Strongly supportive – funding for Tanzania, other countries likely
Sweden	64 6%	56%	-12%	N/A	N/A
UK	178 8%	27%	-39%	Doubling aid over next 3 years	Support for AFT – but no firm progress on AFT
US	223 3%	48%	-58%	Increase in total aid by 50%, with the same proportionate increase in aid to basic education channelled through the MCA	Extremely cautious about support for FTI
Total bilateral ODA	4161 9%	21%	-16%		

* A significant proportion of education aid for some donors is 'unspecified' by level, some of which might actually be allocated to basic education. These figures are, therefore, an underestimate if anything. For example, 57% of Italy's education aid is classified as 'unspecified'.

N/A No information available.

Sources Columns 1, 2 and 3 from Al-Samarrai (2003); FTI draft proposal (2002); GCE (2002a and b); Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2003); USAID (2002); <http://www.usaid.gov/keyaid/education.cfm>

It should be recognised, however, that there is considerable variation between the five AFT countries – which have significantly different policy environments both from each other, as well as from smaller countries. The larger countries often have federal systems which make them less flexible to change, and mean that policy changes can take longer to take effect. There is also a need to ensure that resources would ultimately be available for the AFT countries so that, once they have put the required effort into producing plans, they can be assured of significant additional donor financing. Without this, incentives for reform will be weakened. This would imply considerable commitment on the part of donors, as the external funding gap estimated for these countries is approximately 30% of the total (Table 2).

Table 2: estimated external financing gap

Estimated total financing gap in 47 countries (billion US\$)	2.8
% total:	
Financing gap in 18 FTI countries	34%
Financing gap in first round of 7 FTI countries	7%
Financing gap in second round of 3 FTI countries	8%
Financing gap in 5 AFAT countries	30%

Source calculations using Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala (2003) estimates

DFID's position potentially has an important influence over other donors in the like-minded group, so their concerns need to be taken seriously. Some supporters of the FTI have raised concerns that DFID's criticisms, and the forceful way they have been expressed, could have serious ramifications for the process as a whole – weakening political support for the initiative and paring it down to an advocacy and monitoring initiative that does little to address the core problems of inadequate funding, low quality aid and weak planning processes. DFID's support for the initial five AFT countries partly

reflects these countries' strategic importance in terms of DFID's own programme – an approach which other donors are also likely to favour, but one which could undermine the FTI's potential to achieve a more rational allocation of aid flows. Instead, this approach seems likely to mean the continuation of 'business as usual': some additional support and resources might go to countries with a strong donor base, but countries which currently have few donors – 'donor orphans' – might become even more marginalised as a result. In addition, since donor success is partly monitored according to how many additional children get into school, a focus on high population countries – while increasing the likelihood of a substantial increase in absolute numbers of children in school – risks neglecting the urgent needs of countries with smaller populations, that may continue to have a significantly higher proportion of out-of-school children than the AFT countries.

Finally, while providing analytical support to weak performers might be useful in helping them to move on-track (although the underlying assumption that the principal need in these countries is donor technical assistance, rather than financial resources, needs testing more seriously), it is unclear what support is envisaged beyond that already provided to these countries. It's also unclear whether DFID (and other donors) are willing to move beyond the countries that they already support. Meanwhile, progress on developing the AFT has been extremely slow and it remains unclear what precisely it entails – although DFID and the World Bank have convened donor meetings to discuss drawing up a formal framework, this has still not been made public. This has raised questions both about whether the AFT is simply a repackaging of 'business as usual', and more broadly about DFID's aims around EFA (ActionAid 2003).

An important aspect of the FTI is that it is envisaged that external support will be provided for recurrent expenditures. Some donors have already been moving in this direction through direct budgetary support, or pooled assistance in the context of sector-wide approaches (SWAps), and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). More direct support to recurrent expenditures raises the challenge of ensuring that aid flows are consistent and sustained over a period of time. Donors would, therefore, need to commit resources for a five to ten year period, which is problematic under existing arrangements where budgets are decided on a much shorter time scale. The FTI might provide a useful framework within which progress towards longer-term donor commitment can be assured. At the same time, there has been little movement in this direction post-Dakar, pointing to the systemic obstacles in the way of changing aid modalities and approaches – a challenge that raises fundamental issues about what aid is for, and what objectives donors are pursuing.

A key debate that remains unresolved is how money to FTI countries will be disbursed. The original intention was that implementation would be undertaken through a multi-partner consortium. As the World Bank report notes:

‘ Donors would need to forego many of the trappings of the way aid is channelled today in favour of resource pooling that would permit them to monitor only overall outcomes, and not their national share of procured inputs. Whether this flow of assistance could be coordinated across

agencies as they currently operate or would merit a specific new mechanism for pooling EFA support in new ways cannot be said’ (Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala 2003, p99).

At present, it appears as if donors are continuing to support countries in which they have programmes, rather than testing new multi-partner approaches to disbursing aid. Oxfam International argues that Niger, one of the poorest FTI countries, is caught in a donor catch 22: it badly needs additional aid because it currently has so few donor programmes, yet because it has so few donor programmes, donors are reluctant to support its education reform and expansion plan (Oxfam International 2003).

At one level, the FTI demonstrates international commitment to EFA goals. Several key donor agencies are devoting a considerable amount of energy to the process, with staff within different agencies being identified as taking key responsibility for the FTI. In addition, there has been some reversal in the downward trend in resources to education, with an increased focus on basic education in recent years. However, a cynical view that has been expressed by some NGOs is that the FTI is simply a public relations exercise for donors – with little evidence so far that they will actually come up with the necessary resources. An examination of the flurry of press releases emanating from a range of organisations would seem to suggest that public relations is at least one of the outcomes.¹³ While more time is needed to judge whether it will be the principal outcome, the slow pace of progress since Dakar and the weak donor response has generated growing impatience amongst some NGOs and Southern governments.

Country selection

Criteria for the first round of country selection on the FTI aimed to ensure that governments are committed to universal primary education, within the context of a broader poverty reduction and development framework. Specifically, countries were selected which have a 'sound' education plan integrated into a national PRSP (Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala 2003, p14). Drawing on the Dakar Framework for Action, the Global Monitoring Report (GMR) (UNESCO 2002c, p 129) defines a credible plan as one that 'recognises the need for genuine and inclusive political processes, synergy with overall government policy, and results-based plans that set clear directions for programme implementation and accountability.' Specifically, UNESCO (2002d, p54) considers that a minimum set of criteria for the overall assessment of plans should include clear evidence of:

- 1** Political commitment by government as a whole.
- 2** Engagement of all stakeholders in its preparation, particularly civil society representatives, and resulting collective ownership of the plan.
- 3** Attention to all six Dakar goals.
- 4** Sustainable monitoring and evaluation procedures, including performance indicators.
- 5** A thorough analysis of the present situation (recent data and studies).
- 6** Links to other development planning processes.
- 7** Sector-wide planning, linking EFA to all levels of education.
- 8** An appropriate policy framework.
- 9** Building a sustainable institutional framework.
- 10** Detailed budgeting of financial resources, and resulting identification of gaps.

According to the World Bank's definition, a sound plan should clearly identify constraints; analyse the potential implications of different options that could be considered to address these constraints and estimate their probable cost implications; and help ensure resources and compensatory actions are targeted to underserved and disadvantaged groups. This definition is narrower than the UNESCO set of criteria, and importantly excludes points 1 and 2 – evidence of political will, and engagement of stakeholders in the plan's preparation. Ideally, the World Bank (2000b) suggests that the EFA strategic document should make explicit reference to the PRSP, which should mean that there is some civil society involvement, although this is not necessarily the case in practice.¹⁴ The GMR criticises the World Bank definition of a credible plan for being 'an overly narrow, technical view of planning for education' (UNESCO 2002c, p130). Yet while no agency is likely to disagree with the broader set of UNESCO criteria in principle, they are potentially too vague to be implemented in practice. The Bank's criteria, despite the limitations identified in the GMR, have the advantage of being few and relatively transparent, and lend themselves better to implementation.

Concern has been raised about the use of PRSPs as a criterion for inclusion on the FTI. UNESCO (2002d) notes, for example, that funding should go ahead where good EFA plans exist before the PRSP process is complete; and that a number of countries with significant EFA needs are not part of the PRSP process, or are several years off developing full PRSPs (such as Bangladesh), and that these countries should not be excluded. UNESCO also considers that a focus on PRSPs, which are World Bank-driven, is too narrow and should be extended to include all viable development programmes or plans with a poverty focus.

Originally, the global initiative was intended to draw on existing documents, including national education plans, education SWAps and PRSPs. However, with the World Bank taking the lead, an additional layer of documentation was initially required in the form of a FTI proposal for which the World Bank provided a 'Fast-Track Template' and technical advice (World Bank 2002k). In general, the initial proposals from African countries followed the standardised format provided in the 'indicative framework' drawn up by the World Bank (World Bank 2002o). In contrast, proposals from outside the African region have tended to use a more differentiated approach, and a broader analysis – perhaps reflecting in part the stronger national planning capacity in the non-African FTI countries. While this requirement has recently been changed to avoid duplication and parallel planning, with a revised sector plan now being treated as the FTI proposal, it appears that FTI proposals are still being prepared.¹⁵ For example, Ghana has recently prepared a specific FTI proposal (August 2003).

In general, the FTI documentation states that country proposals should be prepared through a country-driven process building on existing PRSPs and sector-wide education plans, and include five key elements (FTI Secretariat, nd a):

- 1** evidence of country ownership
- 2** key sector issues, including constraints and strategies to achieve the expected results
- 3** costs and finance
- 4** risks and capacity
- 5** indicators and monitoring.

In practice, although the assessment checks consistency of FTI proposals with PRSPs and education plans, the proposals have often been prepared independently of the sector planning process (sometimes by different people) and PRSP. In particular, the costs and financing aspect of the proposal involves complex modelling, which often relies on World Bank expertise (see below). The proposals undergo a formal review process, jointly conducted by country-based development partners and the FTI Secretariat based at the World Bank. The framework for FTI proposals provided by the World Bank is more prescriptive than the UNESCO guidelines for EFA plans. Where in-country agencies have previously already endorsed some form of policy framework (for example in the form of a sector-wide approach) they are concerned that it could be difficult for them to distance themselves from the previous positions in favour of the FTI framework. Some agencies and national governments fear that this may create tensions within their agencies and between them and the countries they are supporting, as the goalposts shift and they potentially move towards greater 'conditionality' through the FTI process (see below).¹⁶

On the basis of the initial criteria, 18 countries were invited to join the FTI in June 2000 and submit their FTI proposals (see Table 3). These 18 countries are estimated to represent 18 million out of a global total of 113 children out of school. Of these, seven countries were selected in November 2002 at a donor EFA consortium meeting in Brussels as having satisfied the criteria and established plans warranting additional donor support (these countries are Burkina Faso, Guinea, Guyana, Honduras, Mauritania, Nicaragua and Niger) (see, for example, World Bank 2002l; Table 3). Bolivia, Ethiopia and Uganda also produced FTI proposals by November

2002. However, Bolivia withdrew its FTI proposal before the Brussels meeting. There has been a considerable debate within Uganda – especially between the education and finance ministries – about whether it should become part of the FTI process, as a result of which the government did not formally submit a proposal. The Ethiopia proposal was not endorsed on the grounds that discussions on a pre-existing sector plan between government and the donors was still ongoing. The FTI proposal that was initially submitted assumed additional donor support independent of the sector planning process, and the FTI Secretariat responded that this was at odds with the fundamental FTI objective of assuring coherent support for the overall sector plan. At a second consortium meeting in Paris in March 2003 three further plans, for Gambia, Mozambique and Yemen, were also ‘endorsed’. Some donors have been critical that even the proposals for the countries accepted for funding are poorly conceived and focus unduly on the external financing gap, and there has been an effort by some bilateral donors – citing absorptive capacity as an issue – to get FTI countries to downscale their plan’s financing requirements and be more ‘realistic’ about what donors are prepared to deliver.

What is clear is that selection of the initial FTI countries is based primarily on ‘good performance’, rather than any assessment of ‘need’ (in relation to economic conditions, current education indicators, or external funding gap, for example). Analysis in the GMR shows that the initial FTI countries are, in fact, slightly better off compared with other low-income countries, which on average have weaker development and education indicators. The latter group have lower income levels, as well as higher rates of adult illiteracy and lower primary enrolment rates than the initial group of FTI countries. According to the GMR analysis, 28 countries are seriously at risk of not achieving any of the three quantitative goals (primary net enrolment rates, level of adult literacy, and gender parity in primary school gross enrolment rates), and 43 countries are likely to miss at least one of these goals by 2015. Of the 28 countries seriously at risk, only six are part of the initial 18 FTI countries (see Table 3). The World Bank Action Plan (World Bank 2002m, p13) identifies Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, East Timor, Iraq, Liberia, Kosovo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, West Bank and Gaza as countries and territories in conflict or emerging from recent conflict that are not ‘on track.’

Table 3: comparison of country groups

Fast Track Countries			Others at risk	
Endorsed	not endorsed	Analytical	(GMR)	
<i>Burkina Faso</i>	Albania	Bangladesh*	<i>Benin</i>	<i>Guinea-Bissau</i>
Gambia	Bolivia	<i>D. R. of Congo*</i>	<i>Burundi*</i>	<i>Iraq</i>
<i>Guinea</i>	<i>Ethiopia</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>Cameroon</i>	<i>Lebanon</i>
<i>Guyana</i>	Ghana	<i>Nigeria*</i>	CAR*	<i>Madagascar</i>
<i>Honduras</i>	Tanzania	<i>Pakistan</i>	<i>Chad</i>	<i>Mali</i>
<i>Mauritania</i>	Uganda		<i>Comoros</i>	<i>Morocco</i>
<i>Mozambique</i>	Vietnam		<i>Djibouti</i>	<i>Nepal*</i>
<i>Nicaragua</i>	Zambia		<i>Equatorial Guinea</i>	<i>Senegal</i>
<i>Niger</i>			<i>Eritrea*</i>	<i>Sudan</i>
<i>Yemen</i>				

*countries unlikely to have a full PRSP by mid-2004

Countries in bold - EFA success countries

Countries in italics - GMR 'at risk'

Source Appendix 2

None of these is included among the original 18 FTI countries (although the Democratic Republic of Congo is included among the five AFT countries). As Save the Children Fund point out, donor failure to focus attention on low-income countries under stress (LICUS), where two-thirds of the world's children out of school are situated, implies that millennium development goals (MDGs) will not be achieved.¹⁷ Without new aid modalities and approaches to education development that build capacity and move countries systematically towards FTI status, the FTI is unlikely to generate significant global progress towards the education goals.

The 10 countries whose FTI plans have been endorsed comprise only 15% of the Bank's estimate of a US\$2.8 billion annual external funding gap, according to Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala estimates (Table 2), implying that support for these countries is just the tip of the iceberg. The conservative estimates for these ten countries amounts to approximately US\$400 million per year. Yet so far, approximately only US\$300m has been committed to the FTI plans (it remains unclear whether all these commitments are genuinely additional – for example much of the French support to Guinea and Mauritania is recycled bilateral debt relief under the HIPC initiative), raising serious questions about donor commitment and credibility. Furthermore, while many recipient countries see themselves as having fulfilled their side of the bargain, donors are still debating where the resources will come from to support the external funding gap, and how the funding will be organised – this can reasonably be expected to weaken the incentives for reform in FTI countries.¹⁸ Over a year after the launch of the FTI, and three years after Dakar, the intention that external partners would 'provide financial and technical support in a

transparent, predictable and flexible manner' (UNESCO 2002d) has not yet been achieved.

The country selection criteria have been widely criticised as being biased in favour of strong performers, which are also the countries most likely to already have a strong donor presence. Gustafsson (2002) suggests that in some cases it is even possible that aid receipts are already beyond the implementation capacity of some countries on the fast track list. For example, he suggests that Mozambique's problem is not access to funds but its inability to spend due to internal capacity problems and external conditionalities. This criticism has also been raised by DFID, who has argued that increasing financial support in these situations could mean an inefficient allocation of resources. More detailed analysis of the absorptive capacity of particular countries, in particular those included in the FTI, is urgently required to substantiate (or otherwise) these claims.

Even though country selection is supposed to be based on a full PRSP and sound education plan, the GMR notes that most EFA plans set out education goals in very general ways rather than as specific outcomes that can be assessed or measured. The 18 core EFA indicators are rarely used – with financial indicators most likely to be missing. In addition, the core indicators do not include any related to donor financial commitments so this information is usually not included in EFA plans (Rose 2002b). Furthermore, in addition to ensuring 'sound' fiscal, budgetary and administrative foundations, an important reason for using PRSPs as a selection criterion is because it is intended to ensure the involvement of civil society in policy formulation and monitoring (World Bank 2002b). However, civil society engagement in the PRSP

process has often been weak. There is also often a tension between civil society and donor objectives around the PRSP – given that the criteria used to evaluate the quality of a PRSP (which incorporate key adjustment conditionalities) are opposed by many NGOs.

As discussed earlier, questions arose at the start of the selection process about the need to include some high population countries, which have weak policy environments and account for the largest number of out of school children. As the World Bank (2002b) highlights, strong political commitment, including support and pressure from civil society, is particularly needed in post-conflict countries where institutional capacity is especially weak. As the World Bank paper goes on to point out, donors tend to reward ‘good performers’, whereas ‘poor performers’ might be those most in need of support. This has continued to be the case in the FTI in practice. More fundamentally, selecting countries according to FTI criteria has shifted the EFA focus from a ‘global’ initiative towards a more selective approach to accelerating progress towards the goals – raising questions about how serious a commitment exists to achieving the goals globally.

In summary, on the one hand selecting countries on the basis of EFA plans and PRSPs is in the spirit of the initial proposal at Dakar for a global initiative, which sought to link good policies to additional finance. On the other hand, their adoption does not take into account a country’s starting point, and means that the weakest countries will continue to be

left out of the framework. For countries where a weak policy environment reflects lack of serious commitment to achieving EFA, this would be in the spirit of the Dakar framework and original vision of the global initiative. However, for many countries, it is not the lack of serious commitment, but other obstacles (often outside the control of the education sector) which constrain their ability to produce ‘sound’ education plans. Meanwhile those countries which already receive substantial donor support and have been in a position to produce ‘sound’ education plans and PRSPs will continue to be the focus of donor attention in the FTI.

Recognising this issue, some stakeholders have argued that the FTI should ultimately include some form of interim support for countries with weaker policy environments, as part of a consistent effort to move them towards full FTI status (this was one rationale for the AFT). An alternative view put forward is that poor performers should not be the responsibility of the FTI, since the initiative’s explicit intention is to deliver on the Monterrey commitment of additional support for committed partners. According to this viewpoint, poor performing countries require very different kinds of support from that being offered under the FTI, that can better be provided through more flexible instruments and approaches. Clearly, there is an urgent need for donors to reach agreement on how countries with weak policy environments can practically build the capacity to develop sound sector plans and satisfy FTI eligibility criteria (whether through the AFT, LICUS or other approaches).

Cost simulations and resource mobilisation¹⁹

A key development of the FTI has been the use of cost simulations to estimate the funding gap on a country-by-country basis, an exercise that has been more rigorous and comprehensive than previous attempts at estimating a global funding gap.²⁰ (Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala 2003; Mingat, Rakatomalala and Tan 2002). The indicative framework arising from this work is considered to be the basis of the FTI, and implicitly sets out a reform agenda for the FTI countries. Similar simulations to the one used in FTI have been used before elsewhere for similar purposes.²¹ There are two key limitations in this kind of exercise. First, the outcomes of the model are only as good as the data put into them. However sophisticated the model, it will be constrained by the poor quality of data available in many FTI countries. The data used at the country level deserve careful scrutiny – for example, accurate education spending figures are often not easily obtainable, particularly in decentralised systems. In addition, budgeted figures can differ substantially from actual expenditures, although the former are often relied upon since they are more readily available.

Widespread data problems exist with other indicators. In order to project enrolments, it is necessary to have estimates of the school-aged population. In the World Bank study, these are drawn from the UN/World Bank population database which is considered to be the best internationally comparable set of population estimates available. It is recognised that there is a higher risk of error in the age-specific data compared with the overall population estimates (Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala 2003, p35). There are well-known problems with population projections in many developing countries which rely on outdated census figures, and which are unable adequately to take account of HIV/AIDS, the effect of war and migration.

As Bennell (2002) notes, the projections undertaken do not consider different population growth scenarios which could seriously influence the results. There are also notorious problems with national enrolment and repetition data, where there might be incentives for schools to over-estimate enrolment in order to be allocated more resources, for example. Furthermore, since data on completion are often not available, the World Bank studies estimate a proxy indicator on the basis of the number of pupils completing grade 5 or 6 minus the number of repeaters. This does not take into account dropout in that grade which, as they acknowledge, means that it is likely to be an overestimate of actual completion rates. In addition, the rates are not adjusted for age, so they are influenced by over-age enrolment. In systems where a significant number of children started school above the official school starting age, it is possible that these gross completion rates (as with gross enrolment rates) could be over 100%. In addition, while attempts were made to use the most recently available data (year 2000 where possible), this would not take account of bulge cohort of students entering the system as a result of recent policy changes. For example, the massive increase in enrolment as a result of the fee abolition in Uganda in 1997 would not reach grade 6 until 2003. Mingat, Rakatomalala and Tan (2002) recognise this, suggesting that the under-estimate of completion rates in 2000 is likely to overestimate the financing gap to achieve EFA by 2015. Estimates should not, therefore, be taken at face value but need to be carefully interrogated.

The second over-arching problem with the use of simulation models is that their focus is on quantifiable indicators of access, quality and financing (as will be seen, six key indicators or 'indicative benchmarks' are addressed in the World Bank simulations). However, there is obviously a

wide range of other indicators which cannot be quantified in this way and, importantly, considerable diversity within as well as between countries, which is not reflected in the country models.

It is recognised that some attempt at estimating the cost implications of education reform is important – and has been one of the most neglected areas in the UNESCO EFA country reports (Rose 2002b). Without such an exercise, it is not possible to know whether the proposed reforms are financially feasible. The modelling has ensured explicit commitment to the abolition of user fees, for example, while recognising the need to ensure that additional resources are made available to compensate for the loss of income. However, care needs to be paid that these simulations do not receive a greater focus than they deserve – they are just one part of the picture and, importantly, they need to be placed in the context of an analysis of political economy of reform to ensure that policies proposed are not only financially feasible, but are also politically viable. For example, the commitment to the FTI by both donor and recipient countries is clearly related to high-level political backing. During the short time that the FTI has been in existence, there have already been changes of government and reshuffling of posts within governments, which have affected some of the key supporters of the FTI. This raises questions about whether the initial momentum behind the FTI could be sustained in the absence of these key players.

Estimates of the additional costs for achieving universal primary education (UPE) by 2015 vary considerably between different studies, particularly comparing individual country estimates (see Bennell 2002 for a detailed exploration of differences between simulations attempting to achieve EFA by 2015). The estimate for Bangladesh from the World

Bank study is, for example, 18 times higher than that of the UNESCO study (UNESCO 2002c). In general, cross-country estimates vary between studies depending on the range of countries included in the analysis, and whether they refer only to the external funding gap or total cost of achieving EFA. It is, however, notoriously difficult to estimate the amount of external support spent on education (and even more difficult to identify support to primary education in particular) (see, for example, Bennell with Furlong 1998). This is even more complex where donors give funds through overall budgetary support to countries. Figures for the amount of resources available from external support vary between 3 and 10% of the total amount spent on education, with some countries receiving as much as 40% of their funds for education from international resources (UNESCO 2001a, p9). An important difference in the results of the models is also the variation in assumed costs of service delivery, and the types of policies which are considered in the modelling.

Indicative benchmarks

The cost simulations undertaken in the World Bank studies interpret the MDG goal for education in terms of completion of five or six years of primary schooling.²² As Bennell (2002) notes this is potentially a more ambitious target than achieving a net enrolment rate of 100% by 2015, as the net intake would need to be 100% by 2009/10 in order to ensure completion of five years by 2015. Based on the primary completion rate (PCR), 86 countries are defined as at risk of not achieving the goal by 2015, of which 60 are low income and 26 are middle-income countries. Even though this variable can be considered a more desirable indicator than net enrolment rates, given that many countries have already been using some form of simulation for costing their education sector plans, it is

questionable what the value-added is of re-calculating models using a new model specifically for the purpose of the FTI. The existing modelling exercises also project reductions in increases in the admission rate together with dropout and repetition, which would have a similar result of improving the PCR according to country-specific circumstances. In addition, a key area of concern is that the World Bank's version of the global initiative focuses on primary schooling, omitting the broader aspects of EFA.²³ Moreover, a focus on primary school completion is largely meaningless unless learning outcomes are also addressed. While some country proposals do consider issues related to broader learning outcomes, the cost implications of these are usually not integrated into the modelling exercise directly.

For the purposes of the cost simulations, countries with available data were grouped into four categories:

- **group 1** EFA success countries: GER 85% or above and a primary completion rate of 70 percent or above [10 countries]
- **group 2** high inefficiency countries are defined as ones with a GER over 80%, and PCR below 60% [8 countries]
- **group 3** low coverage countries have a GER and PCR both below 60% [7 countries]
- **group 4** other countries (either GER and CR in the middle range; or GER is an outlier) [24 countries].

The countries included in the analysis are classified as low-income countries with a population of over 1 million that have not yet achieved universal primary completion.²⁴ The 47 countries included in the final simulations include 14 of the initial 18 FTI countries. Of the four not included, two (Bolivia and Vietnam) are omitted because they are already close to achieving 90% completion in grade 6. It is therefore surprising that they should be included among the 18 FTI countries. Guyana is excluded because the population size is less than one million, and Albania is excluded from the adjusted sample due to the unique institutional legacy of former Soviet Union countries. In addition, a further three countries classified as 'EFA success' countries are amongst the initial 18 countries (Gambia, Uganda and Zambia); and seven of the selected countries are in the indeterminate fourth group. Thus, only four of the 18 (and three of the initial seven) FTI countries are identified as in either group 2 or 3 which are identified as having characteristics of being at risk of not achieving the education MDG. Of the final seven countries selected for the first round of the FTI, the primary completion rate varies from 20% in Niger to 67% in Honduras, implying a very different challenge among the group of countries (Appendix 2).

Based on calculations of mean averages for each of the groups, Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala (2003 p63) propose characteristics of relative EFA success countries:

- Devote a higher *share of national resources to public primary education* (1.7% of GDP compared with the sample average of 1.5% of GDP).
- Exhibit about average *unit costs* (spending the equivalent of 11.8% of per capita GDP per public primary student, compared with the sample average of 12.4%).

- Pay *annual teacher salaries* averaging 3.3 times per capita GDP.
- Spend slightly more than average of their *recurrent budget on items other than teacher salaries* (26% compared with 24.4%).
- Have a *pupil-teacher ratio* of about 39:1, slightly below the average for the sample.
- Have much lower *repetition* than the other groups (9.5% compared with the sample average of 15.2%).

In summary, the pattern of the EFA success countries is identified in the study by 'healthy spending; reasonable unit costs; teacher salaries; class size, and low repetition'. Group 2 is characterised as 'inadequate spending and excessive repetition', while group 3 is 'low primary coverage deriving from a disastrous combination of low spending, high unit costs driven by extremely high teacher salaries and relatively poor

performance' (Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala 2003, p 63-64). The characteristics of EFA success countries have been translated into 'indicative benchmarks' (Table 4).²⁵

The basis of the benchmarks is extremely problematic given that only 10 countries are included in the EFA success sub-sample on which they are based, and that there is considerable variation in the level of indicators amongst the countries (and amongst the EFA success countries themselves), which evident from the large standard deviations (Table 5).²⁶ For example, although the relationship between PCR and teacher salaries as a multiple of GDP does appear to be negative there is considerable variation, including amongst countries that have achieved a PCR over 70% (see Figure 2).²⁷ Furthermore, the GMR comments that 'the FTI's proposed solutions in the form of norms and benchmarks have been derived from education system analysis isolated from a wider societal context' (UNESCO 2002c, p176). As discussed below, the indicative benchmarks neglect a number

Table 4: indicative benchmarks

Service delivery	
Average teacher salaries (as multiple of GNP per capita)	3.5
Pupil-teacher ratio	40:1
Spending on inputs other than teachers (as % of recurrent education spending)	33
Average repetition rate (%)	10 or lower
System expansion	
Unit cost construction	\$6,500-\$12,600
System financing	
Government recurrent revenues (as % of GDP, excluding grants)	14/16/18*
Education spending (as % of government current revenues, excluding grants)	20
Primary education spending (as % of total recurrent education spending)*	50/42
Private enrolments (as % of total)	10

* depending on country circumstances

Source Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala (2003)

of important areas of education sector reform, including ones that deserve attention in estimating the cost of reform.

A previous version of the report misclassified some countries. While this has now been rectified, this has partly been achieved by changing the parameters of the four groups – an indication of the arbitrariness with which they have been created.²⁸ For other countries, (for example Haiti and Honduras) the PCR (but not GER) has changed so that they now fit within their identified group. With a GER of 60% and PCR of 40%, the Democratic Republic of Congo is

still misclassified in group 4 rather than group 3. Such changes could have important implications for the benchmark norms, given the small number of countries in each category. For example, recalculating the averages according to the categories in the previous version of the report results in teacher salaries as a multiple of GDP per capita increasing from 3.3 to 3.9 for group 1 (the group from which benchmarks are estimated). Furthermore, the arbitrary selection of groups means that a significant number of countries do not fit into any of the three assigned categories. Group 4 includes a mix of countries with a completion rate of

Table 5: averages for indicators by Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala country groups

	teacher salaries	pupil teacher ratio	non-salary recurrent spending %	repetition rate	govt revenue (%GDP)	public spending on ed (% public spending)	public spending on ed (% GDP)	public spending on primary ed (% total)	% pupils in private schools	
1	Mean	3.3	39.0	26.0	9.5	20.7	18.2	3.8	48	7.3
	Std. Deviation	1.8	12.3	7.4	6.4	7.1	7.6	2.2	6.2	5.9
	Minimum	1.2	19.9	19.4	2.0	10.8	9.7	1.8	39	0.0
	Maximum	6.6	55.2	45.0	20.0	35.9	30.1	8.0	59	15.7
2	Mean	3.7	47.4	20.6	25.1	21.3	17.0	3.0	51	8.8
	Std. Deviation	1.2	13.0	11.1	7.8	13.7	8.3	1.4	10.2	7.7
	Minimum	1.5	24.4	4.2	14.2	9.8	4.3	1.7	37	0.8
	Maximum	5.3	64.6	42.4	36.1	55.7	32.6	6.3	66	22.0
3	Mean	6.9	55.8	26.9	19.5	17.1	16.9	2.6	51	7.8
	Std. Deviation	1.7	13.3	4.2	8.4	8.5	7.5	0.7	10.3	7.0
	Minimum	4.9	36.5	20.5	8.0	9.1	8.0	1.2	36	0.0
	Maximum	9.6	78.9	31.1	32.8	34.6	31.5	3.6	64	21.2
4	Mean	3.2	38.2	25.4	12.1	18.9	16.8	3.0	47	10.2
	Std. Deviation	1.8	13.4	14.0	9.7	10.1	7.2	1.8	11.2	17.0
	Minimum	0.4	12.8	9.1	0.1	8.0	1.4	0.3	26	0.0
	Maximum	6.8	72.0	67.8	27.1	46.1	30.4	7.2	66	76.6

Source calculations from Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala data

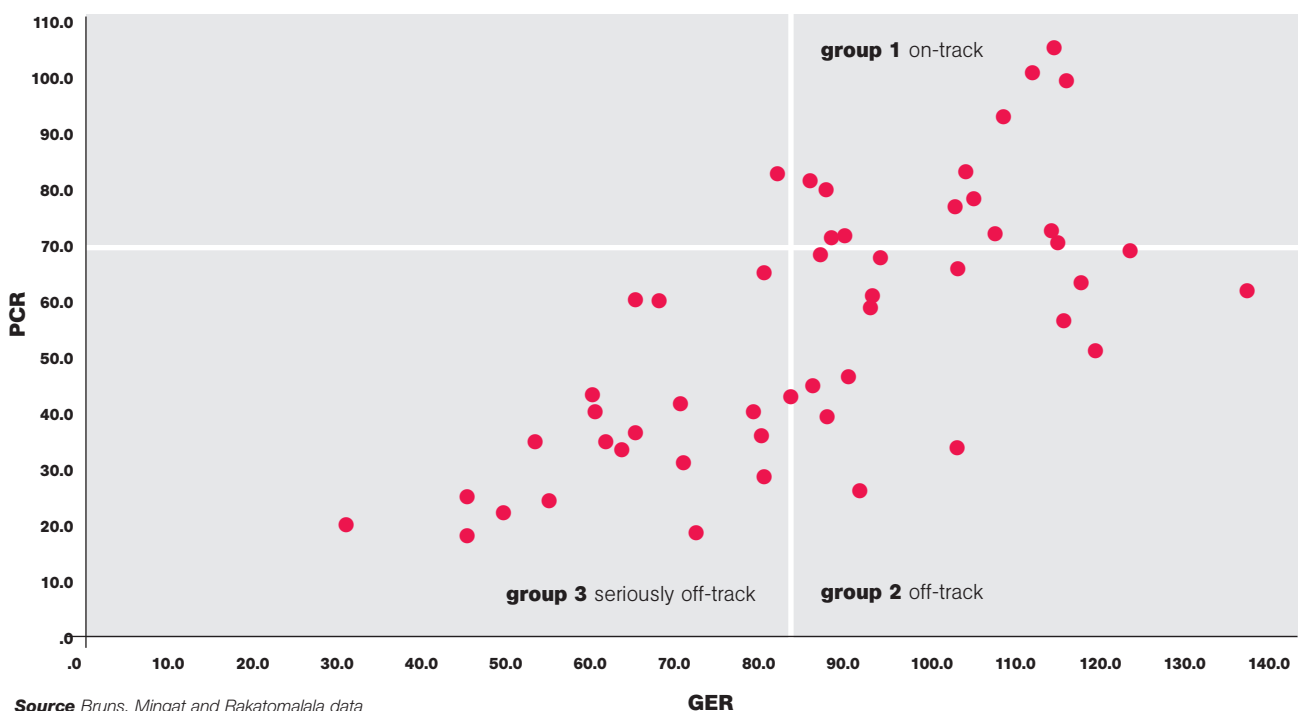
60-70% (regardless of GER); and countries with a GER between 60 and 80% (regardless of PCR). Thus, these remaining countries include significant diversity. Perhaps a simpler way would have been to divide countries into quadrants. The GMR, for example, categorises countries into quadrants according to the level of NER, as well as whether the NER has been increasing or declining over the past decade (UNESCO 2002c). This dynamic aspect is missing from the World Bank analysis, but is significant for estimating whether or not a country is moving in the right direction and is, therefore, on-track. Furthermore, the GMR also examines whether or not countries are on-track in relation to the gender target – an aspect which is neglected in the World Bank report (no gender-disaggregated data are included in the report).

Using the data available in the World Bank report, an alternative way of dividing countries could be as follows:

- **group 1** on-track – countries with GER at least 85% and PCR at least 70% [16 countries]
- **group 2** off-track – GER at least 85% and PCR less than 70% [15 countries]
- **group 3** seriously off-track – GER less than 85% and PCR less than 70% [23 countries].

It cannot be claimed that these groupings are any less arbitrary, but they do at least avoid a catch-all category, and ensure a more even spread of countries into each section (Figure 1).

Figure 1: GER and PCR by group



Source Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala data

Using these categories, some countries in group 2 appear to be moving in the right direction – if the higher GER compared with lower PCR is due to a time lag in improvement in the PCR, resulting from an increase in intake into the first grade of primary (although ideally data would be used to show this). Those in group 3 (which is likely to include a number of other countries which are not at present in the analysis due to lack of data) are those most in need of additional support. Whether this is support in terms of external resources or in terms of capacity to spend existing resources effectively deserves investigation. Re-grouping in this way results in some of the values for the group 1 ‘EFA success’ countries changing, although still with considerable variation within this group (Table 6). Teacher salaries

as a multiple of GDP is similar in both groupings, and the maximum value in both ‘success’ groups is 6.6 (Lesotho) – significantly higher than the mean value used as a benchmark.

Playing around with the numbers in this way potentially diverts attention from more fundamental questions regarding the appropriateness of the indicators in the first place, an issue that is examined in more detail below. However, the analysis aims to highlight the fragility of the benchmarks. While the GCE has called for donors and developing countries to ‘agree to agree’ on ‘a small number of flexible but specific normative criteria for transparent assessment of the strength of national education plans’ (GCE April 2002c, p2), they

Table 6: averages for indicative benchmarks using alternative groups

	teacher salaries	pupil teacher ratio	non-salary recurrent spending %	repetition rate	govt revenue (%GDP)	public spending on ed (% public spending)	public spending on ed (% GDP)	public spending on primary ed (% total)	% pupils in private schools
1 Mean	3.1	31.6	22.2	6.6	20.5	18.2	3.9	42	9.2
Std. Deviation	2.1	12.8	8.2	6.8	6.9	7.6	2.1	9.9	18.7
Minimum	1.0	15.2	10.0	0.0	9.3	8.1	1.3	20	0.0
Maximum	7.0	51.8	45.0	20.0	35.9	30.1	8.0	59	76.6
2 Mean	3.3	41.8	22.2	17.6	20.6	17.9	3.3	50	7.1
Std. Deviation	1.6	12.2	12.9	11.4	10.9	7.5	1.8	7.7	10.0
Minimum	0.4	12.8	4.2	0.1	9.8	1.4	0.5	34	0.0
Maximum	5.3	55.2	52.9	36.1	46.1	32.6	7.2	64	35.6
3 Mean	4.4	47.6	25.6	17.5	18.3	15.6	2.5	50	9.1
Std. Deviation	2.2	14.8	7.4	9.5	11.0	7.0	1.1	10.8	8.0
Minimum	0.9	24.4	10.3	1.2	8.0	3.2	0.3	35	0.0
Maximum	9.6	78.9	36.6	32.8	55.7	31.5	5.6	66	29.4

Source calculations from Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala data

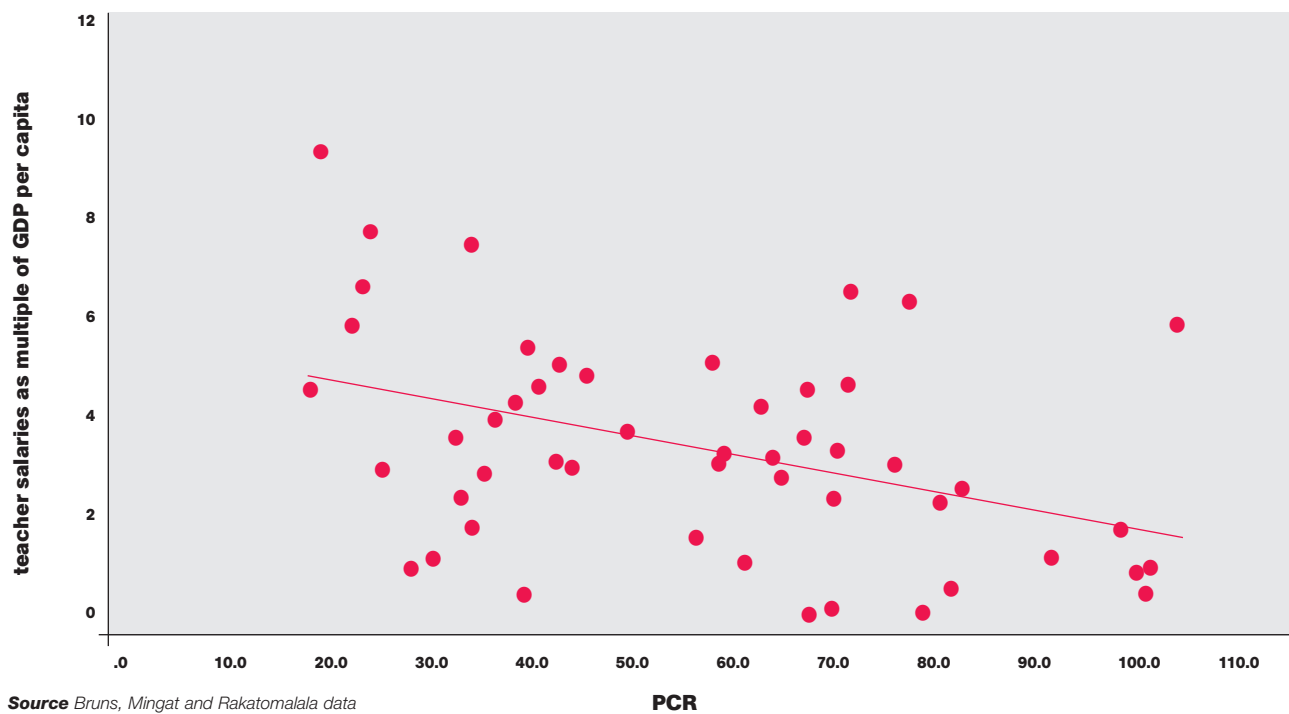
are clear that these criteria should not become new conditionalities – a point that the FTI partners also make. The GCE paper also talks about ‘benchmarks’ but uses the term in a very different way to that adopted in the indicative framework, with the principal benchmark being ‘that the national leaders have identified education for all (EFA) as a national priority and have put in motion a credible and participatory process for producing a costed and time-bound national plan to achieve the EFA goals’. Such criteria are included in the assessment of FTI proposals (FTI Secretariat nd), although given less weight in deciding whether or not a country is eligible compared with the more formal indicative benchmarks.

Probably the most controversial benchmark is that of teacher salaries at 3.5 times GDP per capita.²⁹ A focus on teacher salaries is important given that they comprise the vast majority of recurrent education spending in most countries (often over 90%). The ‘high’ level of teacher salaries in some countries, particularly francophone African ones, is also a cause that Mingat (1998) has previously sought to highlight. There is agreement by FTI partners that there is a need to consider issues related to teacher salaries, although differences of opinion about how this should be done.

It is worth noting that the ‘low coverage’ group, which comprises only seven countries, includes five francophone African countries as well as Eritrea and Ethiopia. It is well known that the francophone countries have higher than average teacher salaries as a multiple of GDP per capita for important historical reasons (see for, example, Colclough et al

forthcoming). Similarly, Ethiopia’s figure is known to be higher than average, which is partly related to its extremely low level of economic development. Since GDP per capita is so low, and teachers comprise the vast majority of the formal employment sector, this is not surprising. As the economy grows, and more people join the formal sector, it is likely that the relative importance of teachers’ salaries will diminish as has happened in other countries. This point is raised in the draft Ethiopia FTI proposal (which was not approved for financing first time round), which maintains the teacher salaries at their existing level of 7.8 times GDP per capita. Mingat (1998) argues that there is a trade-off between higher than average teacher salaries and pupil-teacher ratios, implying that quality could be improved by employing more teachers at a lower rate of pay, thus decreasing the pupil-teacher ratio. However, a low pupil-teacher ratio in some areas of Ethiopia reflects low demand for education, connected to a variety of factors that are unrelated to the high level of teacher salaries (Colclough et al forthcoming). Salaries need to be determined through consultation with key stakeholders at the national level – based on an examination of salary levels adequate to attract and motivate qualified teachers, and ensure they work under acceptable conditions. While analysis of average teacher salaries can help to indicate where financial constraints might be eased, and teacher salaries as a multiple of GDP per capita can be useful for international comparisons, it is not helpful for understanding conditions at the country level. It is, however, apparent that this indicator is being used in simulations adopted in FTI proposals (see *Table 7*).

Figure 2: relationship between PCR and teachers' salaries



Source Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala data

The World Bank has been quick to state that the teacher salaries' indicator is not a conditionality or ceiling. The final version of the World Bank analysis suggests that:

'The 'right' level of teacher salary in a given country is one that is sufficient to attract qualified individuals into teaching and motivate continued good performance, given that the schools are in competition with other sectors for educated workers. The precise level will depend on the supply of educated individuals, the demand from all sectors of the economy (and foreign countries), and the combined attractiveness of salary and non-salary

compensation (such as shorter work hours, long vacations, and job stability that are common in the teaching profession). Only labour market data for the individual country can determine the appropriate wage for teachers in a given context.'

(Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala 2003, p 68).³⁰

However, since donors are committing themselves to finance recurrent expenditures, they are likely to be particularly keen to keep teacher salaries in check, and to ensure that their contributions to recurrent costs are used to recruit additional teachers where pupil-teacher ratios are high and/or to buy teaching and learning materials, rather than to pay existing teachers more. As will be discussed

below, in reality the benchmark is being carefully monitored in the assessment of the FTI country proposals.

In practice, increasing or decreasing teacher salaries as foreseen in the indicative framework is politically unrealistic and economically problematic in many countries. Bennell (2002) notes that the benchmark would mean that teacher pay would need to increase by over 100% in 10 of the 47 countries included, requiring resources to increase significantly in these countries. By contrast, 28 of the initial 55 countries in the sample would need to reduce their level of teacher salaries, some of them substantially. In Niger, for example, teacher salaries would need to reduce by 63% (from 9.6 to 3.5 times GDP per capita) – from US\$1,630 to US\$595 per annum. According to Education International, this is both unrealistic and unacceptable (Education International 2003). Since it is clearly not feasible to reduce salaries of those already employed, any reduction in average teacher salaries is most likely to occur by reducing the cadre of experienced teachers (who are at a higher point on the salary scale) and replacing them with less experienced, lower-paid teachers under new conditions. This could also include the recruitment of 'voluntary' teachers or para-professionals. The implications of this for the quality of education provided and for learning outcomes need to be carefully monitored.

With reference to other indicative benchmarks, repetition rates have been adopted as an indicator of efficiency. However, the final version of the Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala report (2003) recognises that these are often a policy variable rather than an indicator of educational outcomes. For example, policies related to automatic promotion between grades where repetition rates are low, or the need to pass end of year examinations where rates are high,

will affect repetition rates. As Bennell (2002, p15) comments 'while there is quite a strong negative correlation between primary school completion and pupil repetition, the link with school efficiency and learning outcomes is likely to be weak or non-existent'. For example, countries with low repetition rates might achieve a high PCR as a result of automatic promotion, with children completing schooling without achieving basic learning competencies. By contrast, the World Bank report suggests that there is 'accumulating country experience with tailored strategies that are effective in reducing repetition; they include, for example, introducing local language instruction in the critical early grades of primary school, designing the first two grades as a single curriculum block to provide children more time to master key concepts, improving teachers' ability to assess students' progress during the year, or providing cross-peer tutoring for children falling behind.' (Brun, Mingat and Rakatomalala 2003, p64).

Private school enrolments are taken into account in the modelling process. On the one hand, Bennell (2002) notes that primary education provision by NGOs may be more cost-effective than public provision (although little rigorous analysis exists to substantiate this). Donor agencies often fund these programmes but these resources are typically not included in the estimates of external resources to education. They are not, therefore, included in the model estimates. On the other hand, private enrolments have been increasing by default in some countries where education systems have expanded rapidly in recent years, with the parallel systems offering education at even lower quality than the state system – caution is called for in promoting private schooling in such circumstances (Rose 2002a). The Africa report (Mingat, Rakatomalala and Tan 2002) is aware that there is likely to be a

threshold to the expansion of the private sector, as the increase in enrolment is likely increasingly to comprise children from the poorest families or those from the most deprived circumstances who would be unable to afford to enrol in private schools. As a result, their simulations assume that the share of enrolment in the privately financed sector would fall as countries approach EFA by 2015. However, in contradiction to this, the Guidelines for the Assessment of EFA FTI proposals include an investigation of the scope for the private sector to expand access and improve quality (FTI Secretariat nd a).

For some, the indicative benchmarks are seen as an opportunity to obtain specific commitment to policies concerning increasing government resources for primary education, and ensuring that primary school fees are abolished. In Ghana, for example, the benchmarks have been used by civil society organisations for advocacy purposes in these areas, as well as to ensure integration of a comprehensive gender equity policy into the FTI country proposal. Education International, however, expresses concern about the indicative benchmark of 50% of the recurrent budget allocated to primary education. While recognising the importance of primary education, there is concern that other sub-sectors of education are being squeezed as a result of the attention given to primary. Clearly, transferring funds from one level of education to another, without an increase in the overall sectoral envelope, would have implications for their funding. While the intention of the FTI is that overall resources are increased, this is not always happening in practice. Some NGOs argue that a reduction in donor resources to post-basic education would encourage privatisation, possibly in line with broader World Bank objectives. Meanwhile, the model requires assumptions about changes in transition rates to secondary, yet the

World Bank report fails to make these explicit – or to report their cost implications. In order to ensure that the expansion of primary schooling is not occurring at the expense of other levels (which are in any case necessary to ensure sufficient qualified teachers are available), the model's assumptions need to be explicitly stated.

In terms of anticipated domestic resource availability, the projections are based on assumptions regarding changes in government revenue as a proportion of GDP, public spending on education as a proportion of total education spending, and primary education spending as a proportion of the total. They are not, however, explicit about estimates of economic growth. These are extremely difficult to predict, but will have a strong influence on domestic resource availability. Bennell (2002) suggests that, at the very least, the analysis should be presented using high and low economic growth scenarios. It is also evident that decisions about education spending cannot be isolated from considerations that need to be made by ministries of finance regarding the size of government budget, and resources needed for other sectors. The modelling makes assumptions about the former, using an indicator of government expenditure as a proportion of GDP (with a benchmark of 14-18%). The Ministry of Finance in Uganda suggests that the approach used in the modelling displays a misunderstanding of how national budgets are drawn up, since it is not the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to decide on the national resources available for education (Tumuheirwe 2002). The paper notes that it is more appropriate to first determine the overall size of the total budget given potential budgetary resources and macroeconomic factors, and then decide on the optimal share of these resources to each sector. In principle, the FTI should address this if the proposal is rooted in a country's PRSP and medium-term

expenditure framework, but this does not appear to be happening within the Ugandan context at least. Furthermore, the estimates importantly only take account of public expenditures, excluding the amount that households spend on education. This can be considerable even in the absence of official fees (Colclough et al forthcoming).

In principle, the World Bank documents are clear that the indicative benchmarks should be used as a starting point for evaluating and costing countries' EFA plans, but that they would not be used rigidly without reference to a country's individual circumstances:

'although these technical benchmarks can serve as a common frame of reference for all countries, the exact mix of policy actions required will be country-specific, depending on a country's starting parameters' (World Bank 2002m, p11).

However, this appears to contradict the view in the same paper that:

'In order to bring technical rigor, transparency and financial discipline into the EFA planning process, we propose that these policy parameters constitute the 'benchmarks' for good system performance. In each country, a 'credible EFA plan' would define the process of reform that would bring its performance in line with these benchmarks.'

(World Bank 2002m, p15).

Similarly, on the one hand, the World Bank notes that flexibility is needed in adopting policy measures, but on the other hand:

'Countries would need to accept benchmarks for system performance and a non-bureaucratic yet participatory way of involving development partners in monitoring budgets and progress.'

(Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala 2003, p99).

Furthermore, the Guidelines for the Assessment of EFA FTI proposals include a comparison of parameters in FTI country proposals with the indicative benchmarks. Country proposals should include information on the parameters in the base year and targets for 2015, which would be compared with the benchmarks that have been set. At the working group meeting in July 2002, it was agreed that the process for country proposals should be centred on the indicative framework and resource requirements (Uchida 2002), putting the cost and financing aspect of the proposal, based on the benchmarks, at centre stage. Furthermore, in preparation of their FTI proposals, 'invited countries' were asked 'to agree to benchmark their current level of resource mobilisation and service delivery parameters in relation to the EFA Indicative Framework' (World Bank 2002k).

It is evident that, in practice, the benchmarks do have a strong influence over country FTI proposals and sector plans (*Table 7*).³¹ While the actual values adopted for the benchmarks might vary from those suggested, proposals are firmly rooted in the concepts of the indicative benchmarks, which form the basis of the modelling for individual countries.

Based on an analysis of the country plans, Takala (2003) reports that the seven plans that have been accepted for the FTI demonstrate a high degree of compliance with the indicative benchmarks. By contrast, draft plans from Ethiopia and Mozambique which were not initially approved were found to be excessively costly, particularly because of their high level of projected teachers' salaries and classroom construction costs. As Takala (2003) points out, while the benchmarks are not prior conditionalities in the strict sense, FTI missions sent out from Washington, DC by the World Bank in mid-2002 in preparation for country plans worked to ensure a high degree of consistency with the indicative benchmarks. Countries were expected to justify deviations from the benchmarks, as these would have a significant effect on the external funding gap as estimated in Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala's report. This focus has serious implications for the broader agenda which EFA goals are intended to address.

As Gustafsson (2002) notes, there is a need to distinguish between simulations, international experience that should guide planning, and internationally agreed benchmarks that constitute conditions for access to external funds. As he points out, such distinctions are difficult to make in practice, which runs the risk that simulation models will be translated into conditions for funding – as indeed appears to be happening. This, in turn, undermines country ownership and negates the complexity and context-specific aspects of national reform.

A major omission of the Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala (2003) study is the lack of any attempt to calculate resource requirements to achieve the 2005 MDG (eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary enrolment). While the challenge of achieving the education MDG, by focusing on completion, is more ambitious than the EFA goal agreed at Dakar, the MDG related to gender has been made easier by focusing on the achievement of gender parity in terms of grade one intake by 2005 (and then to ensure that initial gender equity is maintained as the 2005 cohort moves through the system) (World Bank 2002m, p14). While this is more realistic (although it is unlikely that it can be achieved in the next two years), it potentially dilutes the focus on gender.³²

The Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala report discusses a broader set of policy options, which includes measures to promote education of girls. However, these are not costed explicitly, thereby marginalising the gender aspects from the mainstream analysis. As other studies have shown, in order to address the gender gap there is a need for demand-side programmes that are likely to require additional resources as well as strong political commitment (see, for example, Colclough et al forthcoming). This will also be the case for other hard-to-reach groups who are widely excluded from the education system, including nomads, linguistic minority groups and orphans. While the intention might be to include demand-side subsidies under the category of 'spending on inputs other than teachers', evidence suggests that unless resources are earmarked for these purposes, they are not likely to be made available.

Table 7: summary of information from simulations in selected country FTI proposals

	benchmark	Ethiopia		Gambia		Uganda		Guinea		Nicaragua	
		2000	2015	2000	2015	2002	2015	2001	2015	2000	2015
service delivery	2015										
average annual teacher salary as multiple of GNP per capita	3.5	7.8	7.3	4	3.5	3.17 (trained) 2.56 (untrained)	3.5 (trained) 2.56 (untrained)	2.61	3.22	2.5	3
pupil-teacher ratio	40:1	67.9:1	45:1	33:1	40:1	57:1	40:1	46:1	40:01:00	36:1	35:1
spending on inputs other than teachers (as % of recurrent education spending)	33	8.5	28.6	21	25	25	33	33	33	33	33
average repetition rate (%)	10	15.6	10	9	3.6		10	17.4	10	8.2	8
system expansion unit construction cost	US\$6,500-US\$12,600	US\$15,500	US\$15,700	N/A	N/A	US\$8000	US\$8000	US\$9000	US\$9000	N/A	N/A
system financing govt current revenues (as % of GDP, excluding grants)	14/16/18	19.6	22	18.5	18.5			11.5	16	23	18
education spending (as % of government current revenues, excluding grants)	20	14	20.6	16.7	20	22	20	15.7	20	14	20
primary education spending (as % of total recurrent education spending)	50/42	49.4	54.2	47	55	67	60	40.6	50	65	65
private enrolments (as % of total)	10	8.3	6.2	23.6	10	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	7	7
annual funding gap in BMR (high)			239		4		110				8
annual funding gap in country proposal simulation			US\$327		US\$3		US\$84				US\$15
annual funding from external resources over last 4 years			US\$36.3		US\$5.45		N/A				N/A
to basic education			N/A		US\$2.4		N/A				N/A

The information in the table is based on draft reports, some of which include different figures for the same variables within the report. Missing information is sometimes because only incomplete reports (not including appendices) were available. The information included is, therefore, only intended to be indicative, showing the relation between the country FTI proposals and indicative benchmarks. The funding gap in the Gambia simulation is based only on the information included in the simulation model – not the additional strategies (including gender) which are costed separately.

With respect to orphans, while some attempt is made in the model to estimate the cost implications of HIV/AIDS for the education sector, Bennell (2002) notes that no assumptions are made about the potential influence on repetition and dropout rates, which are likely to be affected by the increasing incidence of orphanhood as a result of HIV/AIDS. In addition, the GCE has pointed out that the model uses a strict definition of (two-parent) orphanhood which would be difficult to apply in practice, and means that a large number of (single-parent) orphans would be excluded. This would again underestimate the financing requirements. Bennell (2002) also criticises the model for assumptions made about teacher attrition rates arising from AIDS-related deaths, which are based on them being at similar levels to the rest of the adult population. Moreover:

‘Given that the profiles of primary school teachers vary so markedly across countries, it is very difficult to project the impact of the epidemic on the teacher population. In the MB [Mingat and Bruns] model, increased teacher mortality will result in higher levels of recruitment with new teachers being recruited at 3.5 GDP pc in countries where teacher’s pay exceeds this level. Consequently, the overall impact of the epidemic is therefore to reduce teacher costs. This is somewhat perverse since the available evidence shows that increased morbidity and mortality can lead to higher staffing costs, especially in high prevalence countries.’
(Bennell 2002: 18).

The Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala (2003) study estimates an external financing gap of US\$2.9 billion, based on the assumption that developing countries will cover 80% of the additional financing needs for basic education. The GMR (UNESCO 2002c) proposes that the estimates in the World Bank study are the more comprehensive and dependable compared with other similar studies. However, the GMR also notes that even this study ‘almost certainly underestimates both the expenditure implications of the move to UPE and the external aid requirements quite considerably.’ (UNESCO 2002c, p142). For example, by including only 47 countries, up to one-quarter of children currently out of school are not covered by the analysis. In addition, the modelling adopts a six-year primary cycle for all countries, ignoring the additional costs for countries with longer systems. The GMR also considers that ‘the assumptions concerning the speed of policy change and the extent of required fiscal reform envisaged in the World Bank study are too demanding’ given that quality improvements in education take time (UNESCO 2002c, p142). It proposes that public resources available to primary schooling are likely to grow at a much slower rate than assumed in the World Bank study.

The intended effect of many of the World Bank’s indicative benchmarks is to drive down expenditure through cost-saving measures and increase the volume and share of domestically generated resources in education financing. While these are important considerations, the range of key policy options to expand supply, improve quality and stimulate demand that are mentioned in the report could substantially increase the cost requirements (the only explicit measure to address demand which is costed is related to HIV/AIDS). The benchmark for spending on inputs other than teacher salaries could address some of the quality and demand aspects

but, as mentioned, this needs to be disaggregated to ensure specific concerns are addressed. The Gambia draft FTI proposal is interesting in this regard. Simulations based on the indicative benchmarks alone indicate a very low external funding gap which, assuming that current levels of external financing were to continue, would more than cover the funding gap. The draft proposal, therefore, also costs a range of other quality-enhancing and gender-equalising reforms outside of the FTI framework, that significantly increase the external funding gap.^v Similarly, the Nicaragua FTI proposal includes demand subsidies which, while considerably more modest than those in the Gambia proposal, increase the external funding gap by 50%.

The GMR estimates that the size of external aid requirements will be up to two-thirds higher than those projected by the World Bank. Importantly, the GMR also proposes that some categories of policy change and resource provision are not adequately covered in the World Bank's analysis. These include the treatment of gender, a fuller estimation of the impact of HIV/AIDS and consideration of the situation of countries in circumstances of emergency (UNESCO 2002c). The additional costs estimated by the GMR resulting both from slower projected growth in domestic resources for education, and increased demand-side financing, bring the global funding gap up to US\$5.6 billion per year – almost double the World Bank estimate of US\$2.9 billion.

However, even working with the World Bank's conservative estimates, the financing of the goals is unlikely to be met on current trends. The report notes that the 33 African countries included in the analysis account for US\$2.1 billion of the US\$2.9 billion annual financing gap. However, these countries have only received US\$500 million of official development aid for primary education over the past three years on average, implying that the annual external support to these countries would have to more than quadruple. One important reason for the low financial support is related to limited absorptive capacity in some of these countries (Colclough et al forthcoming). The Mingat, Rakatomalala and Tan (2002) report acknowledges this potential constraint, noting that countries' capacity to absorb extra funds may be low because of weak budgeting and expenditure management systems, as indicated by poor disbursement in many donor-financed projects. Takala (2003) points out, for example, that the current volume of external funding to the existing Basic Education Sub-Sector Investment Programme (BESSIP) in Zambia is already 50% higher than the financing gap estimated in the simulation. At the same time, both the macroeconomic framework pushed by the IMF and World Bank in IDA countries, and bilateral donor programme conditions and procedural requirements, contribute to absorptive capacity problems in many countries. Donors need to do more to differentiate between these different aspects of the problem, and undertake reforms to the development framework and their aid programmes, to minimise the barriers to countries effectively absorbing additional funds.

One important piece of information necessary for projecting resource gaps which is unavailable or incomplete in the FTI proposals is information from donor agencies on already existing external financing commitments. While the World Bank report has figures for bilateral ODA for education for individual countries from OECD DAC sources, these data are notoriously incomplete (particularly where funds are channelled through budgetary support mechanisms, for example). As a result, it is not possible to know whether existing external resources are sufficient to fill the funding gap for particular countries or, if not, what additional resources would be needed. While the FTI is potentially a useful tool for leverage on donors to ensure that commitments made can be measured and compared more systematically, it is significant that reliable, detailed information on external funds to particular countries is still missing. This is an area that deserves much greater attention than it currently receives.

Overall, while a focus on the simulations raises questions about whether financing is the most serious constraint to achieving the EFA goals, the analysis clearly shows that an external funding gap remains, which is likely to be substantially higher than projected in the Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala study. There is a need for continued, rigorous analysis at the country level, ensuring careful interrogation of the data used, and proper consideration of the range of policy options required to achieve EFA by 2015.

A summary of key issues

1 Process

- 1** While bilateral aid is increasing, it remains insufficient to meet the education funding gap in low income countries. It is also not clear whether recent commitments do more than reverse the decline in aid to education in the 1990s.
- 2** Donor funding of recurrent costs requires far-reaching changes to donor practices – beyond the education sector – which are politically and technically demanding. These include issues of predictability, harmonisation and coherence. While the FTI framework intends to address these issues, so far limited progress has been achieved in these areas.
- 3** Civil society has not been as engaged in the FTI process as originally envisaged in the framework, and there has been little transparency around key decisions or sharing of information. This problem extends to developing country governments, and donor staff in operations.
- 4** The success of the FTI will be strongly determined by the degree of consistent political support from key champions – changes of government and political appointment have disrupted progress on the FTI in some countries, and in donor agencies.

2 Country selection

- 1** While clear criteria have been established for country selection, these do not include consideration of need. As a result two countries deemed to have achieved the goals, and a large number of 'EFA success' countries are included among the initial 18 FTI countries. Meanwhile, the PRSP eligibility criterion means that many of the countries furthest away from the goals are unlikely to be considered for additional assistance in the foreseeable future.
- 2** Criteria for country selection on the FTI reward strong performers with a donor presence. While in principle an Analytical Fast Track could complement the FTI by supporting weak performers, there has been little progress in defining its scope and purpose.
- 3** The PRSP eligibility criterion is too narrow, since it doesn't necessarily capture a country's commitment to the EFA goals, or its ability to absorb additional resources. Some countries may also have other poverty-related programmes which are not considered at present.

3 Simulation modelling and indicative benchmarks

- 1** Simulation models help to turn ‘wish lists’ into ‘shopping lists’, and can help to ensure that resources are available to fund proposed reforms. However, their limitations need to be recognised. In particular, the following areas need more attention:
 - the use of poor quality data on government and external expenditures
 - the unpredictability of economic growth, and the tendency of World Bank projections to be unduly optimistic
 - unreliable population projections and enrolment data
 - the use of proxy indicators for completion
 - exclusion of explicitly costing key demand-side strategies
 - an excessive focus on quantifiable indicators.
- 2** The indicative framework benchmarks are based on very flimsy evidence – related to experience in 10 diverse countries, with a wide variation in the indicators – and should not be treated as a straightforward guide to policy reform choices.
- 3** The relationships examined in the Bank’s analysis (for example between pupil-teacher ratios and levels of teacher salaries) need to be analysed in a broader historical and political context. Similarly, the focus on the relationship between repetition rates and primary completion rates is likely to be misleading, since repetition rates are often heavily influenced by other factors (for example, policies on automatic promotion).

Recommendations

The following points summarise the key recommendations arising from the issues outlined in this paper. One over-arching recommendation is the need for on-going rigorous analysis at the country level of education financing needs in relation to the resource envelope for basic education. In particular, more information is needed to enable tracking of the level and use of external resources. This is critical if the FTI is to target additional resources effectively, and contribute to sustainable progress towards the EFA goals.

1 Process

- 1** Donors and national governments urgently need to arrive at common agreement on the key objectives and priorities of the FTI, a timetable for rolling out the initiative, and clear indicators for ongoing monitoring of progress.
- 2** Donors need to make FTI planning genuinely transparent, and country-led, by creating forums for donor-government dialogue, and publishing and disseminating information.
- 3** Donor resource commitments to education, and basic education in particular, need to be monitored more rigorously, beyond the existing OECD DAC data.
- 4** Donors need to set a clear timeline for mobilising the additional donor resources needed to implement sector plans that have been approved by donors in-country, and at the EFA consortium.
- 5** Donors and governments need to make a serious effort to broaden the education sector planning process to include civil society organisations, including NGOs and teachers' unions.

- 6** Donors and governments need to ensure that the FTI promotes balanced development across the education sub-sectors, and with other sectors, and does not divert energy and resources from the achievement of other EFA goals.

2 Country selection

- 1** Donors need to identify need-aid modalities that enable them to move beyond their current priority countries, and ensure that poor performers – many of them affected by conflict – that are furthest off-track are not neglected.
- 2** Donors need to revisit the PRSP eligibility criterion for the FTI, and take into account all low-income countries with viable, poverty-focused development programmes.
- 3** Donors, led by the UK Department for International Development, urgently need to reach agreement on the scope and objectives of the Analytical Fast Track. In particular, clarity is needed on whether the Analytical Fast Track is an interim stage leading to full Fast Track status, with donors committed to additional funding of credible education plans at the end of the process.
- 4** In practice donors need to work to ensure much greater flexibility in how sector plans are developed through the FTI, so they are clearly rooted in existing country programmes and poverty reduction strategies.

3 Simulation modelling and indicative benchmarks

- 1** Donors need properly to address the complexity of simulation modelling at the country level. This requires time to collect reliable data, cost the full range of strategies needed to achieve EFA, and estimate resource requirements against alternative assumptions of economic growth and population projections.
- 2** Where simulation models have already been used in countries to cost education plans, these should be adopted for the purposes of the FTI. Donors should use the simulation model and the indicative framework as tools to open a debate about efficiency, quality and equity issues in the education sector, rather than as a blueprint.
- 3** At the country level a strong planning process requires reliable, detailed information on domestic and external funds to education (by level and type of spending), in order to reach a broadly accurate picture of the financing requirements for achieving EFA.
- 4** Donors and recipient governments need to work in a genuinely coordinated way to ensure that resource considerations are coherent with national macro-economic frameworks. This will require the World Bank in particular to work more effectively with the IMF, and integrate human development goals into stabilisation and adjustment programmes.
- 5** The simulation model needs to disaggregate by gender, to help identify the nature and extent of the challenge of achieving the 2005 MDG, as well as address HIV/AIDS implications more fully.
- 6** The simulation model and the FTI planning process need to be broadened to include other EFA goals explicitly, which create powerful synergies with UPE, and are likely to increase the external funding gap.
- 7** The simulation model needs to be clearer about the assumptions being made for post-basic education, to ensure these do not suffer as a result of the focus on the primary sub-sector.
- 8** The World Bank, bilateral donors and recipient country governments need to engage in open dialogue with key stakeholders – including teacher unions – about teacher salary levels, given the political sensitivities in this area.
- 9** More rigorous analysis is needed to assess the extent to which absorptive capacity is a genuine constraint on the effective use of available resources, and whether insufficient resources are themselves feeding poor absorptive capacity.

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Appendix 1: People contacted³⁴

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Abhimanyu Singh	UNESCO
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Lucy Tweedie	VSO
Robert Prouty	World Bank
Mercy Tembon	World Bank

Appendix 2: Comparison of country groups

	GMR-serious risk	BMR groups	GER	PCR	BMR financing gap
<i>Albania</i>		-	104	91	
Angola		2	80	29	46
Armenia		4	86.8	69.8	15
<i>Bangladesh*</i>		1	112.2	69.9	84
Benin	x	2	86.4	39.0	22
<i>Bolivia</i>		-	113.4	97.3	
Burkina Faso	x	3	45.2	25.0	71
Burundi	x	3	59.7	43.0	26
Cambodia		4	134.0	61.0	23
Cameroon	x	2	82.0	43.0	76
Central African Republic	x	3	45.3	19.0	14
Chad	x	4	71.2	19.0	35
Comoros	x				
Congo, Republic		2	84.2	44.0	11
Cote d'Ivoire		4	77.3	40.0	86
<i>Dem Rep of the Congo*</i>	x	4	60.2	40.0	180
Djibouti	x				
Equatorial Guinea	x				
Eritrea	x	3	52.9	35.0	11
<i>Ethiopia</i>	x	3	54.6	24.0	239
Gambia		1	87.7	70.0	4
Georgia		4	85.9	78.8	14
<i>Ghana</i>		4	79.0	64.0	33
Guinea	x	4	62.2	34.0	38
Guinea-Bissau	x	4	69.7	31.0	4
Guyana					
Haiti		4	112.0	71.5	34
Honduras		4	105.4	71.7	9
<i>India*</i>	x	1	100.6	75.7	33
Indonesia		1	106.3	91.0	
Iraq	x				

	GMR-serious risk	BMR groups	GER	PCR	BMR financing gap
Kenya		2	91.3	58.0	152
Lao, PDR		4	120.9	67.3	13
Lebanon	x				
Lesotho		1	102.7	77.0	12
Madagascar	x	2	89.5	26.0	33
Malawi		2	117.0	50.0	39
Mali	x	3	48.9	23.0	55
Mauritania		2	88.4	46.0	8
Moldova		4	80.7	81.1	5
Mongolia		4	92.0	66.5	0
Morocco	x				
Mozambique	x	4	78.5	36.0	54
Nepal	x	2	113.3	56.1	44
Nicaragua		4	100.8	64.6	8
Niger	x	3	31.2	20.0	56
<i>Nigeria*</i>	x	4	85.1	67.0	328
<i>Pakistan*</i>	x	4	64.8	59.0	204
Rwanda		2	101.1	33.0	36
Senegal	x	4	69.5	41.0	55
Sierra Leone		4	63.9	37.0	14
Sudan	x	4	61.1	35.0	107
Togo		4	115.0	63.0	20
<i>Uganda</i>		<i>1</i>	<i>102.0</i>	<i>82.0</i>	<i>110</i>
<i>United Rep of Tanzania</i>		<i>4</i>	<i>66.4</i>	<i>59.0</i>	<i>123</i>
<i>Viet Nam</i>		-	<i>109.5</i>	<i>99.0</i>	
Yemen		4	67.0	58.6	155
<i>Zambia</i>	x	<i>1</i>	<i>84.9</i>	<i>80.0</i>	<i>54</i>
Zimbabwe		-	112.0	103.0	

Notes

Countries in italics are the 18+5 FTI countries

Countries with an '*' are the 5 AFT countries

Countries in bold are the 10 FTI countries selected for financing in the first and second round

'GMR – serious risk' refers to the countries identified as being seriously off-track in the Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2002)

GER and PCR from Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala (2003)

'BMR groups' refers to 4 groups in the Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala (2003) report

'BMR financing gap' is the external financing gap calculated in the Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala (2003) report

Footnotes

- ¹ The website is currently accessible by FTI partners (which does not include the GCE). While it is understandable that some information was not openly available at the time, the issue of who has access to the FTI Secretariat website needs further consideration. The lack of accessibility raises suspicion about what is available to whom, and contradicts the spirit of civil society engagement which was one of the original key intentions of the global initiative. Both NGOs and some bilateral agency representatives are concerned about the secrecy surrounding the website. Clarification of who has access to materials for what purpose is, therefore, desirable.
- ² The growing influence of international NGOs in EFA campaigns is reviewed in Mundy (2002).
- ³ It is not possible for the purposes of this study to make a detailed comparison between the FTI and the Global Health Fund. While there are a number of similarities between the two, there are also notable differences. The Global Health Fund has a dedicated, independent website (www.globalfundatm.org) which can be consulted for further information.
- ⁴ The World Bank was in any case actively involved in supporting the MDGs, so these efforts could be amalgamated with those of the FTI.
- ⁵ See press release at www.unesco.org/education/efa/wef_2000/press_releases/dak_04_27_18h.shtml.
- ⁶ For example, UNESCO documents refer to the World Bank FTI (Matsuura 2002; Parsuramen 2002; UNESCOb 2002) and, as noted in the text, DFID reports also refer to it in this way.
- ⁷ It was not possible at the time of writing to get information about amounts of aid actually committed to the FTI by donors as this was still under discussion at various fora.
- ⁸ See Whelan (2002); Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2003); Richelle (2002); European Commission (2002); Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2002)
- ⁹ See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2002a and b).
- ¹⁰ See Phillips (2002); and Reuters (3/2/2003).
- ¹¹ See USAID (2002).
- ¹² See also GCE (2002b and c). These papers propose increases to G7 and G8 basic education aid, reflecting GNP and existing aid levels, which would add up to a total of US\$4 billion.
- ¹³ The bibliography indicates a wide range of documents that have been produced since the inception of the global initiative in 2000.
- ¹⁴ See Wilks and Lefrancois (2002) for a critique of PRSPs, including in relation to the involvement of civil society in practice.
- ¹⁵ For some countries, a stronger focus on EFA targets might be needed in their existing plans and, in some cases, more a detailed analysis of the financing gap might be required.
- ¹⁶ The term 'conditionality' here refers to the view of some stakeholders that countries will need to meet prescribed conditions (in particular with respect to the indicative benchmarks) in order to become part of the FTI process. This differs from the legally-binding form of conditionality evident under structural adjustment programmes.
- ¹⁷ See www1.worldbank.org/operations/licus for further information.
- ¹⁸ Different agencies took the lead for the assessment of FTI proposals in different countries. (World Bank – Mauritania, Nicaragua; Canada – Burkina Faso, Niger; Germany – Honduras; UK – Guyana; US/France – Guinea). Takala (2003) notes that agencies involved in in-country assessments have different interpretations of the role of the indicative benchmarks with some allowing greater flexibility than envisaged by the World Bank.
- ¹⁹ Attempts were made to obtain a copy of the simulation model to examine its structure. However, this was not made available. In addition, it was hoped that it would be possible to get hold of country FTI reports so they could be compared with the international results. Again, unfortunately it was not possible to obtain most of these. Draft versions of a small number of country reports were obtained which will be referred to for comparative purposes, although it is recognised that these are not the final versions which would have gone through a fuller consultation process and so might change.
- ²⁰ Bennell (2002) provides a comprehensive analysis of six studies which have estimated the resource requirements in developing countries by 2015. The focus of this report is on the projections made in the World Bank studies which have been used as a basis for the FTI.
- ²¹ See, for example, Colclough et al (forthcoming) for use of similar models for the purposes of strategic resource planning with a gender perspective.
- ²² In order to avoid bias towards countries with shorter primary cycles, completion of six years of primary schooling was used except for countries with a primary cycle of five years in which case completion of five years was retained, adjusting budget shares accordingly (BMR 2003, p59).
- ²³ The exclusion of adult education from World Bank priorities is not new (see Jones 1997).
- ²⁴ Low income countries were defined as IDA-eligible in 2001 (i.e. countries with gross national income per head of \$855 or less) (Brunns, Mingat and Rakatomalala 2003, p20).
- ²⁵ Recurrent costs per pupil are determined by teacher salaries, pupil-teacher ratios and proportion of non-salary recurrent expenditure.

²⁶ Standard deviations are not reported with the means in the World Bank reports, although this is normal practice as it gives a picture of dispersion from the mean. As table 5 shows, standard deviations are generally high, also showing the wide variation in the figures within each sub-sample.

²⁷ Weak relationships are also evident for the other indicators based on the countries included in the sample (see Bennell 2002).

²⁸ For example, the EFA success group now includes countries with a GER of 85 percent or above, rather than over 90 percent, so Zambia is now legitimately included in the group. 'Highly inefficient' countries are now classified in a less inefficient way than previously – GER over 80 percent (instead of 70 percent) and PCR of 60 percent or lower (rather than below 50 percent).

²⁹ As Bennell (2002) notes, the simulations do not take into account the changing qualifications and years of experience profiles of primary school teachers. In rapidly expanding systems where a large number of teachers have been recruited, their current salaries levels are likely to be relatively low. They can, however, be expected to increase over the 15 year period.

³⁰ This paragraph is worth highlighting as it is an notable addition to the original draft of the report, which was less cautious about the need to consider teachers' salaries in the light of conditions within individual countries.

³¹ A systematic review of country FTI plans would assist in identifying the application of benchmark norms in practice. However, unfortunately these plans were not available at the time of writing.

³² The study by Colclough et al (forthcoming) undertakes a similar modelling exercise for nine African countries with a gender focus. These cannot, however, be directly compared with the results of the Bruns, Mingat and Rakatomalala (2003) study, because the modelling is for different years and uses different parameters.

³³ The external funding gap from the simulations is US\$2-3 million per annum, while the additional programme activities add around US\$27 million per annum for the next three years.

³⁴ This list includes those who provided information through interviews either by email, telephone, or meetings. A number of other people (notably from bilateral and multilateral agencies) were also contacted on various occasions, but did not respond. This included some key partners in the FTI process, one of whom was in contact to say that the agency felt that they did not want to be involved. These people are not included in the list.

The Global Campaign for Education is an international coalition of child rights activists, NGOs and teachers' unions actively campaigning for the right to education in over 150 countries. For more information, please visit www.campaignforeducation.org

ActionAid is an international development NGO working in over 30 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and a founding member of the GCE. For more information on ActionAid's work in education, please visit www.actionaid.org

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