

Press release

A new momentum to remove the financial barriers to Education for All

Bamako, June 15, 2007 – The capital of Mali will host, from June 19 to June 22, the “International Conference on School Fee Abolition: Planning for Quality and Financial Sustainability”, organized by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), UNICEF and the World Bank, in cooperation with the Ministry of Basic Education, Mali.

Delegates from the following 23 countries, 18 of them African, will take part in this conference: Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Haiti, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Papua-New Guinea, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Togo, Yemen and Zambia. These delegates will be joined by experts and decision-makers representing inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, United Nations organizations, development cooperation agencies, foundations, financial institutions, research and training institutes and civil society organizations.

In total, over 150 participants will undertake in-depth exchanges that will result in recommendations on the challenges of two-fold planning, on one hand, of the satisfactory quality of education, and, on the other, of the sustainability of its financing that the abolition of school fees imposes. This initiative was launched in 2005 by UNICEF and the World Bank to accelerate access to schooling.

The conference will be in two parts. June 19 and 20 will be devoted to technical aspects starting with a review of abolition worldwide in light of experiences and challenges. In this respect, it should be pointed out that the following eight African countries have had experience in the school fee abolition process: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia.

Presentations and discussions in plenary sessions will be followed by group discussions that will address issues as specific and diverse as the construction and renovation of classrooms, the purchase and distribution of textbooks and other school materials, the empowerment of schools through subsidies proportional to school populations, incentive and exemption programs, the abolition of school fees and secondary education, community schools and the public/private education supply.

The countries that have recently abolished or are in the process of planning the abolition of school fees (Benin, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone and Yemen) will pay particular attention to the steps already taken by certain countries as points of reference for the development of their operational mechanisms. The same holds true for the following eight countries interested in the planning and introduction of abolition: Burkina Faso, Guinea, Haiti, Liberia, Mali, Papua-New Guinea, Senegal and Togo.

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have specific concerns. Even if they have reached high global school registration rates, these two countries are looking for the best ways to reach the core groups of those excluded from education who live in extreme poverty.

The experts' debates will thus conclude in recommendations and important messages that will fuel the reflection of the national delegations towards the development of policies and implementation strategies which are likely to guarantee satisfactory quality and sustainable financing in the school fee abolition processes.

These more substantial proposals from the national delegations will comprise the agenda of the policy meeting that the decision-makers or their representatives will hold on June 21 and 22. In this respect, the participation of finance ministers along with their colleagues in education is strongly encouraged. The decisive question of national commitment and support for the countries, which must also be planned, will provide the opportunity to stress the importance of policy dialogue in order to build and strengthen partnerships. The conference should provide a clearer view of the advancement prospects in the countries and internationally so that a new momentum will be given to the efforts carried out to notably remove the financial barriers to Education for All.

Bamako, June 15, 2007

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