

**Calling for Improvements in Australia's Aid for Education**

**SUMMARY:** *Completing primary and early secondary education is one of the most important factors in improving a person's prospects for employment, increasing income and health in later life. However, aid for education from many donors has been stagnant in recent years. Australia is one of a few national donors planning to increase aid for education significantly. As the Australian Government is making education a priority sector in the aid program, it is vital that the Government use its support to individual countries, and its contributions to multilateral organisations, to ensure the people most in need receive basic education (eg, girls, children in remote areas, children with disabilities). Our letters to parliamentarians this month will ask the Government to commit to increasing the focus on basic education as part of its current review of the Australian aid program.*

**THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION**

Education can have a lasting effect on poverty reduction and economic growth. For example, the World Bank has estimated that an additional year of schooling raises a person's income by 10% on average (with a greater increase in developing countries). In addition, education empowers individuals and communities to take charge of their own destiny and make informed decisions. For example, education can cause individuals to increase the use of condoms preventing HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

In particular, education can have an extremely positive impact on the lives of girls and women, as increased education of women reduces discrimination and women who have received an education are also more likely to ensure their daughters are educated. In addition, a study in Bangladesh has found that children are 20% more likely to survive if their mother received primary education. This figure increases to 80% if the mother has obtained secondary education.

In spite of the importance of education, 69 million children of school age do not attend school, due to factors such as lack of family income, remoteness, insufficient funding and fees for basic education. While the number of children not participating in education has fallen, further progress faces significant hurdles. For example, after increases between 2000 and 2005, aid for education through national aid programs has stagnated. Multilateral organisations such as the World Bank and some donors such as Australia are exceptions, committing recently to increased education funding.

**AUSTRALIA'S COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION**

The Australian Government has identified education as a flagship initiative in the aid program, and has indicated that education will make up 18 to 20% of the aid program. In the five years from 2010-11 to 2014-15, the Government plans to provide \$5 billion in aid for education.

This increased commitment is welcome, but the spending needs to be well targeted to meet the most important needs in education:

- The Government needs to direct a high proportion of assistance to countries with low basic education participation (such as Papua-New Guinea) and to the poorest countries with less capacity to provide funding to education.
- At least 40% of aid for education should be to basic education (primary and early secondary education), which produce the greatest benefits to individuals and society.
- Australia's support for multi-sector projects, which include education as a component, needs to build in performance targets and measures for the education component.
- Improving the quality of education is essential to ensure children remain in school and acquire valuable skills. Increasing quality includes developing skilled teachers, through support in providing competitive salaries, training, peer support and professional associations.
- Australia's aid to education also needs to make the participation of girls a priority, through developing appropriate school facilities (eg, separate sanitation for girls and boys), abolishing school fees and developing suitable curricula.
- Australia would also need to increase access for children from remote areas and children with disabilities, which includes action to remove school fees and provide transport to schools.

In the 2011-12 financial year, the Australian Government should increase aid for education to approximately \$860 million (consistent with its five-year commitment) and ensure that at least \$340 million is allocated to basic education as a start to supporting the priorities set out above.

## **REVIEW OF THE AID PROGRAM**

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Kevin Rudd MP, announced the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness in November 2010. The Review panel is due to report to the Government in April 2011. The Review is examining the allocation of aid between countries and between different types of services, and also the management of the aid program. As education is a high priority component of the aid program, the Review provides the opportunity to ensure the increase in Australia's support for education will contribute to achieving universal access to basic education and improve education quality.

## **ACTION**

Write to your Member of the House of Representatives or a Senator in your State, noting the importance of education as a measure to combat poverty, and making the following points:

1. Welcome the Australian Government's increased priority for education within a growing aid program.
2. Welcome the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness as a way of ensuring increased aid, including to education, is spent most effectively.
3. Suggest that the Government should address, when responding to the Review, the proportion of aid for basic education, the quality of education and teaching, and access to education by disadvantaged groups.
4. Ask your Member or Senator to write to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Rudd, seeking to ensure that the Government's response to the Review addresses these education priorities, and that the 2011-12 Budget increases aid to education to \$860 million and for basic education to \$340 million.

See also <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/>