School Fee Abolition Initiative (SFAI) Workshop
Building on What We Know and Defining Sustained Support
Organized by UNICEF and the World Bank
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I. School Fees: A Major Barrier to Education Access

At the UN World Summit in New York (September 2005), world leaders agreed to "provide immediate support for *quick impact initiatives* to support anti-malaria efforts, *education* and health care" [*emphasis added*]. This agreement recognizes the reality of rapid achievements made by countries that have taken bold policy measures and adopted feasible strategies for accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

More than 100 million school-age children currently do not have access to education, and many more are under chronic threat of dropping out of school because of low education quality, discrimination and exclusion – as well as other challenges to development such as poverty, health epidemics and war. These factors have drawn attention to the need to significantly scale up and accelerate progress towards education targets through bold policy measures. Free schooling is one of these measures. In fact, because it unleashes latent demand for education and encourages children from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate, free schooling may be the single most important policy measure that has had a dramatic, transforming impact on school enrolment so far.

School fees are one of the biggest barriers in the expansion of schooling in the poorest countries. Experience in several countries indicates that the private cost of schooling to households is a major barrier that prevents all children from accessing and completing quality basic education. This is particularly significant in countries where poverty imposes tough choices on families and households about how many children to send to school, which children to send to school, and how long they may attend.

> *The children who still do not enter school are largely from poor families in rural areas, and particularly girls and the disabled. For these children, the indirect and direct cost of education to families is the single most important factor excluding children from school. And the single most important policy measure to address this is to abolish school fees. There is a powerful ethical as well as development case for ensuring that no child is excluded from school because of inability to pay.* **Birger Fredriksen**

Analysis of the forthcoming World Bank survey on school fee abolition entitled *Implementing Free Primary Education: Achievements and Challenges* reveals that the battle is far from over. Even Fast Track Initiative (FTI) countries retain various types of fees, although they have robust Education Sector Development Programmes (ESDPs) that are integrated with country Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) – and, thus, are most likely to have the know-how and the leverage to tackle the issue.

> *Today 110 million of the world's children will not go to school. The vast majority are girls. Half of Africa's children will never finish primary schooling. Delivering on education is not just about the empowerment of individuals to realize their potential, putting opportunity directly into their hands. It is also the best anti-poverty strategy, and - with trade justice - the best contribution we can make to growth and economic development. The benefits are in job chances and prosperity-for every additional year of a child's education, estimated average earnings increase by 11 per cent; and in health-for each additional year of a mother's education, childhood mortality is reduced by 8 per cent. But the demand must be for education free of charge. User fees can take as much as a quarter of a poor family's annual income in sub-Saharan Africa. Their very existence discourages parents and is one of the biggest barriers to the expansion of schooling in the poorest countries...And free education should not be at the expense of good quality education. As making education free increases demand, investment in teachers, materials, training and reduced class sizes is needed to increase supply.* **Gordon Brown** (Chancellor of the Exchequer, United Kingdom, in "The Independent", January 4, 2006)

Fee 'creep' is also a problem as new, often unofficial fees are introduced or as the attempt to capture fee revenue moves up in the school system. For example, lower secondary fees are reported to be as much as 20 times higher than the primary-level school fees.

On the other hand, the abolition of school fees is not a panacea. While cost is a major barrier to enrolment, evidence from country experiences is showing that it alone does not determine the demand for education and that other factors need to be addressed if the gains made are to be consolidated and sustained. These factors range from quality issues to specific measures that ensure the most vulnerable benefit from this policy shift. Among the associated concerns are financial, management and logistical issues, policy dialogue, negotiations and trade-offs involving all stakeholders – from the community to the school, from the district to the national level, and including national and international development partners. A bold policy measure on school fee abolition should be undertaken within a studied and sound path to design country-specific and doable approaches and to ensure long-term sustainability.

II. The School Fee Abolition Initiative (SFAI): Supporting Countries in the Realization of Universal Access

Launched in 2005 by UNICEF and the World Bank, the School Fee Abolition Initiative (SFAI) is one of the 'Bold Initiatives' aiming to make a breakthrough in access to basic education and significantly scaling up progress to meet the MDGs and the Education For All (EFA) targets in the next decade. The Initiative has gained considerable momentum through involvement of other key development partners and constituencies (SFAI Partners Meeting).

The goal of this collaborative effort is twofold. First, it is to review, analyze and harness knowledge and experience pertaining to the impact of school fee abolition and how countries cope with the fallout from such a bold policy decision. Second, the goal is to use this knowledge and experience as the basis for providing guidance and support to selected countries as they embark on abolishing school fees. Such support includes planning and implementing the new policy, and securing appropriate external assistance in the short and medium term to cope with the fallout of this bold measure. It is also expected that the guidance and support provided to these countries will help stabilize more equitable and sustainable education systems through better allocation and effective management of resources.

> *We realize the role that the School Fee Abolition Initiative can play in boosting enrolment among the poor. It has a special relevance for girls, as they are more adversely affected by poverty. It is especially significant for us, as the Commonwealth is estimated to be housing about two thirds of the world's out-of-school children.* **Jyotsna Jha** (Commonwealth Secretariat)

In pursuit of these objectives, several activities are now ongoing within the framework of the Initiative (SFAI Concept Note).

III. The Nairobi Workshop: An Important Step Forward for the SFAI Business Plan

A key SFAI activity is the development of an 'Operational Guidance' Paper based on experiential knowledge from countries that have implemented a policy of school fee abolition and that represent good cases to learn from. The Operational Guidance will serve the countries willing to engage in a process of school fee abolition and will be used as a communication and advocacy tool at national, regional and international levels.

Organized by UNICEF and the World Bank, the SFAI Workshop 'Building on What We Know and Defining Sustained Support' was held in Nairobi from 5–7 April 2006. The workshop's objective was to harness experiential knowledge on planning and implementing new policies and to consolidate partnerships for short- and medium-term support to countries that have chosen to abolish school fees (Making the Most of Nairobi). Senior education officials from pioneering countries in sub-Saharan Africa that have been through the challenging process of abolishing school fees – Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania – had an opportunity to share their experiences and lessons learned (*see Table 1*) with other government officials considering a similar move – Burundi and DRC, both of which recently decided to do away with fees, and Haiti, which is considering reforms (*see Table 2*).

The Nairobi Workshop (Nairobi Agenda) offered a platform to draw on both the country experiential knowledge and on research undertaken by experts on school fee abolition, deepening understanding of how to make this policy work in order to deliver robust results in quality basic education. Participants gathered for three days to discuss the challenges of school fee abolition and to lay out the way forward in terms of engaging countries and mobilizing technical and financial resources. They made important technical contributions to the discussions, pledging their commitment to help countries manage the post-abolition phase more effectively and to work together to advance this important policy agenda. The discussions helped to inform the draft 'Operational Guidance' Paper.

With the declining enrolments and the heavy burden of education being borne by households in sub-Saharan Africa, it is apparent that the majority of countries would not achieve the MDGs and the EFA by 2015. There is, however, a growing momentum worldwide to abolish fees as a strategy for enhancing the attainment of the MDGs and EFA. It is gratifying to note that Africa, as a region, has risen to the challenge in that the majority of the participating countries in this workshop have taken that bold initiative. **Dr. Noah Wekesa** (Minister of Education, Kenya) – Keynote Address

Participation in Nairobi (Participants List) was almost double the anticipated number, reflecting the broad agreement and commitment of countries and partners to take concrete steps forward on SFAI. Delegations from nine countries engaged in meaningful dialogue with an array of international participants. Leading development agencies included the World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Food Programme, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the European Economic Community, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Japan, Germany and the Netherlands. Major international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) included the Global AIDS Alliance, Results, the Africa Network Campaign on Education for All, the Forum for African Women Educationalists, Save the Children UK, the Commonwealth Education Fund and the Aga Khan Foundation. The workshop also included international experts and attendees from such academic institutions as Columbia University.

The Nairobi Workshop helped to raise the public and political profile of this issue in international, regional and local press (Press Clips). Journalists who attended the workshop also had an opportunity to visit Ayany Primary School in Kibera to meet with students, teachers and community members who spoke to the challenges and opportunities that emerged when school fees were abolished.

IV. School Fee Abolition: At the Heart of Sound Policy Work in Education and Beyond Education

One thing that is becoming clear is that school fee abolition is no longer just about the enrolment surge and the challenges this poses. We can now see that when properly done, it also opens up the whole education system to scrutiny: Where are the inefficiencies? How did we really spend fees revenue? How can we make better use of teachers, with support from unions, of course? What is the state of the local market for procurement of resources? How efficient and effective are the resource procurement and/or distribution mechanisms? etc. This in effect means that school fee abolition leads to a sort of mini reform of the education system. While we need to keep school fee abolition in perspective and not allow our vision to spill over into a full-blown system reform, it is nevertheless worthwhile to flag this type of mini reform as one of the benefits of school fee abolition. **Cream Wright** (UNICEF)

Education policy frameworks: The Nairobi Workshop demonstrated that the abolition of school fees is a major policy decision that involves massive and solid planning and management efforts, as well as intensive policy negotiations and political trade-offs. These are needed to facilitate the absorption of the shock imposed on the education system, to address the logistics of surge in enrolment, and to ensure that retention, completion and achievement are furthered and maintained (together with quality education). That the poorest and most vulnerable children can benefit from this major policy shift must also be taken into account. School fee abolition needs a sound policy framework that allows for a serious review of education programmes and is well integrated in national EFA plans and sector-wide approaches

Allocation of national financial resources: These sound education policy frameworks should also allow a review of education budgets and a shift in education expenditures, as well as trade-offs for more equitable allocation of education resources. Finance Ministers need to come on board for the consideration of financing options in the short and long term and for sustaining school fee abolition within national budgetary provisions, as well as for ensuring equitable and synchronized investments across all social sectors.

Democratic governance and decentralization: The Nairobi Workshop also demonstrated that school fee abolition requires the strengthening of decentralized structures to ensure a proper flow of resources, supplies and budgetary allocations to the schools, as well as the capacity building of schools in planning, budgeting, procurement and management. Abolishing school fees also needs to factor the strengthening of accountability and monitoring systems to warrant compliance with procedures and transparent procurement and use of funds. The Nairobi Workshop has strongly underlined the necessity to consider communities' needs and the potential for their engagement. The role of civil society was acknowledged as key in developing and sustaining the capacities of communities and in generating resources.

Poverty eradication and social development: School fee abolition cannot be dissociated from poverty reduction strategies. The Nairobi Workshop has affirmed that poor and vulnerable children need to be targeted by additional measures to ensure their effective enrolment and retention. These measures (school meals, subsidies, waiver and income support schemes, conditional cash transfers, etc.) belong to sectors beyond education and need to be efficiently mobilized and managed, as well as rationalized and synchronized. Indeed, the field of social protection mechanisms and safety nets represents a major intersectoral dimension of work, and much more attention needs to be given to the rationalization and synchronization of efforts.

HIV/AIDS: An emerging and key policy aspect of school fee abolition is HIV/AIDS programming and how programmes designed to address the needs of HIV/AIDS-affected children can fit coherently into a strategy of reduction of the private costs of education and the development of safety nets for those who require them. This has shown to be a very new field that requires more systematic strategizing.

External assistance: School fee abolition clearly requires substantial external assistance and front loading of resources to develop technical capacities and to fund the budget gap in the short and medium term. The Nairobi Workshop affirmed that the abolition of school fees needs to be articulated within the new development context of UN reform, of aid effectiveness and of Government appropriation and accountability. SFAI is being brought to the attention of the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (FTI) and the hope is that ultimately, at the global level, it will be folded into it.

External financing now comprises on average about one third of primary education budgets in low-income SSA [sub-Saharan Africa] countries. If the level of aid required to reach EFA (estimated by the Commission for Africa and the EFA Monitoring Report) were to be reached, this share could become almost two thirds in 2015. While I hope this trend will continue, I encourage African policymakers and aid agencies to explore ways of providing external financing that minimize any negative impact of this increased donor dependency, by, for example, (i) making external financing more predictable to minimize negative impact of aid interruption; and (ii) providing aid through debt relief, which would allow countries to use more of their own resources to finance education rather than to reimburse debt. **Birger Fredriksen**

V. Highlights from the Nairobi Workshop

Policymakers face some challenging issues in moving to free basic education. These issues include:

Verifying the nature and scope of fees and ensuring financial sustainability: When fees are eliminated the first concern is often how to replace fee revenue. Timely replacement of fees is essential, especially in cases where fees are part of teacher remuneration. Any significant delay is likely to lead to the informal restoration of fees, to teacher absenteeism (as they seek other sources of income) or to strike action. These were the problems initially faced by DRC. Raising replacement funds is just the first wave of costs; the second stems from accelerated demand, as parents enroll children for the first time or enroll school-age and overage children who have not been attending school. This second set of costs includes expenses related to additional teachers, infrastructure, books and materials. When demand is strong and spontaneous (e.g., in Malawi), a school system can be overwhelmed and class size may unmanageably increase. The result can be a drop in quality, leading parents and communities to mistrust school authorities.

The supply and remuneration of teachers: Apart from eliminating user fees, the supply and remuneration of teachers is the most controversial issue, and policymakers need to assess the likely financial impact of increased demand. Teacher supply and remuneration stand out as a particularly thorny set of issues that place two short-term imperatives in competition: macroeconomic stability as a prerequisite for growth and the urgency of vigorously pursuing the MDGs related to education. Teachers' salaries may amount to 90 per cent of current operating expenditures, crowding out spending for other key pedagogical inputs such as books.

Because of differences in teacher candidate supply, in the strength of the unions and, above all, in political will, each country will have to craft its policies. There is no 'one size fits all', but there are ample opportunities for cross-country learning. The use of contract teachers or paraprofessionals (e.g., in Ethiopia and Mozambique) reduces the financial burden. But maintaining quality of instruction through pre- and in-service training is a challenge. Another challenge is the implementation of equitable personnel management practices linked to a career advancement system. Finally, political pressures may work against the raison d'être of the approach by forcing assimilation with higher paid civil service teachers. DRC is tackling these issues by examining the statute and remuneration of teachers in the framework of a civil service review.

Providing new classrooms: This is a major cost component and a key step on the critical path to implementing a new policy on fee abolition. Planning for infrastructure requires a long lead time. Construction time for a typical six-classroom school averages about 15 months in sub-Saharan Africa, with a cost of US$28,000. Getting new classrooms on line in timely fashion will depend on at least four factors: an adequate school map to locate schools appropriately, with the aim of reducing the distance for students (walking distance is a significant deterrent to girls' participation); efficient procurement methods; the capacity of the local construction industry; and the government's financing capacity. Public investment budgets are typically underfunded, and in the case of education, largely funded by external assistance. In the poorest regions, the supply of adequate school facilities will be a formidable challenge.

In addition, the cost of maintaining existing classrooms and replacing those that are beyond renovation is rarely addressed. This is a long-term task that may be a challenge to the attention span of policymakers and planners. Yet getting school construction policy right is essential to keeping overcrowded classrooms and incomplete schools from limiting access to free education and threatening completion rates. Taking a lesson from Malawi (negative) and Tanzania (positive), the three 'newcomers' (Burundi, DRC and Haiti) have all embarked on inventories of school infrastructure. Even with advance planning, there will be problems due to funding. Tanzania's provision of sanitation, for example, is lagging behind target, according to the delegation.

Looking back at the experience of abolishing fees, we think that good communication and consultation, and the empowerment of local communities, are key to success. **Ethiopian Delegation**

Decentralization, getting the funds to schools, capacity building and governance: As countries move to free basic education, the empirical evidence suggests that the control span of centralized administrations cannot handle strong demand. Consequently, mechanisms for Participatory Expenditure Tracking

Surveys (PETS) have been developed under administrative decentralization schemes to get funds directly to the schools. Pioneered by Uganda in 1998, these mechanisms initially ran into problems of 'leakage'. When the weak points in the downward flow of expenditures were identified, public pressure through newspapers and radio worked quickly – within a year – to correct these anomalies. Since then PETS have become a standard part of the planners' toolkit for verifying the effective transfer of funds to schools.

Many of the delegations (Kenya, Ghana) had conducted PETS or plan them (DRC). The implications for capacity building are enormous. Getting the funds to the schools means changing the attitudes of central managers, retraining regional and district finance staff and, most importantly, empowering the school and the community to manage school funds and exercise oversight. The delegation of Ethiopia reported on the importance of their high-profile ministry of capacity building in rapidly retraining staff at the regional and *woreda* (local district) levels. Both Ghana and Kenya have developed simple but effective administrative and financial management manuals for training school management committees.

> *There is a need for community involvement. People must begin to be more involved and see the benefits of education. It is necessary to mount proper communication strategies and advocacy programmes [around school fee abolition] through community participation and community-led initiatives.* **Professor George Godia** (Education Secretary, Kenya)

Providing for the poorest and most vulnerable: As countries approach full enrolment they encounter the most intractable problems regarding participation. Out-of-school children are the poorest of the poor, living in remote rural areas where access is difficult (such as the nomadic regions of Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia). Posting teachers to such areas presents a special challenge, while the basic logistics of getting books and materials to schools are also difficult and often depend on transport by traders, by other government services, and by NGOs. Schools are dispersed (with walking distances working against girls' participation) and frequently incomplete (less than the full five or six grades), requiring special measures such as multi-grade teaching. Finally, the opportunity costs of sending children to school are highest in these areas.

Kenya is addressing this issue through the 'shepherd' schools and Ethiopia is attacking the problem of opportunity costs by adjusting the school calendar and timetable. Getting the poorest of the poor into school may also require incentives. Conditional Cash Transfers offer a promising subsidy mechanism and represent an innovative and increasingly popular channel for the delivery of social services. They provide poor families with food (either in kind or through food coupons) and compensate parents for the opportunity costs related to child labour – on the conditions that they send their children to school, maintain their participation and take them to health centres for vaccinations and regular check-ups.

Orphans and vulnerable children: Serving these children's needs poses an immediate and growing challenge. Some 15 million children under age 17 have lost one or both parents to AIDS, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa. By 2010, this number is expected to increase to more than 25 million. HIV/AIDS is impacting negatively on both families and communities. In many circumstances, the extended family safety net has disintegrated. Children not only suffer acute psychological distress but, lacking any material means, are forced early into the labour market to fend for their siblings or sick elders. Children have also been orphaned by other causes. Projections for around a dozen African countries suggest that orphans will comprise at least 15 per cent of all children under 15 by 2010.

Keeping orphans and host family children in school is the first line of defence against the further erosion of social capital. Schools provide a safe environment for children to learn basic survival skills through HIV/AIDS prevention programmes and the skills required for participation in the labour market. Schools can also compensate directly for low levels of family care through daycare centres for preschool children and nutritional and health care programmes. However, experience shows that schooling must be complemented by other interventions designed to help keep children in school by eliminating direct costs, compensating host families for the opportunity costs of children's labour, and providing care and counselling to both the orphans and host family members (Kenya). Burundi is making the identification of orphans and vulnerable children an important early step in its planning process.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on teacher supply and quality: The ranks of educators are being depleted in countries impacted by HIV/AIDS, and this erosion of human capital strikes hard in the classroom. In 1999 alone, 860,000 African children lost a teacher to AIDS at a time when there was only about one teacher for approximately every 59 students. In Uganda, the International Labour Organization estimates that more than 50 per cent of all teachers are living with HIV/AIDS. Tanzania loses 100 primary school teachers every month to AIDS. Addressing this problem must be considered when policies demand increased teacher supply.

Balanced development of the overall education and training system: Policymakers must also address downstream issues, notably the balanced development of the overall education and training system. As full enrolment is reached, with most children completing the primary cycle, the immediate challenge will be equitable access to secondary school. Given the momentum of EFA, countries must 'stay ahead of the wave' by developing strategies for addressing the cost barrier to access at the secondary level. In order to address this issue, many countries are shifting more of the costs for technical, vocational and higher education to the main economic beneficiaries. Kenya is already planning for secondary school expansion by mobilizing domestic resources through more efficient spending and cost sharing in other levels of the school system.

> *It is really urgent for countries to develop sustainable strategies for dealing with this pressure [on post-primary education], and for aid agencies to help, and not limit their aid to primary education. The strategies need to address key issues such as (i) how to move from a cycle of primary education of six or seven years to a basic education cycle of eight or nine years; (ii) what share of graduates from basic education, or lower secondary, should continue in publicly financed upper secondary education; and (iii) the balance between general secondary education and technical education and vocational training. The choices that countries make with respect to this sort of issue will have a major impact on labour markets, education financing, equity and, perhaps, also on social stability.* **Birger Fredriksen**

The public sector wage bill and country agreements: An important issue that will surface during the implementation phase is the relationship between the public sector wage bill and country agreements that give priority to short-term macroeconomic stability. Education ministries will have to defend their budget share through strong sector plans based on the improvement of internal efficiency and on more efficient spending. Ghana is working to achieve efficiencies at all levels of the education system, with cost sharing for programmes that have a high private rate of return, such as upper secondary, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and university studies. School fee abolition has forced Ghana to examine how it can better mobilize domestic financial resources. Planning the future teaching force must take into account the replacement needs and costs of the public sector as a whole, as well as a country's broader labour market. A tight labour market will engender stiff competition between the public (education and health being the largest employers) and the private sectors for the recruitment of graduates. Some Southern African Development Community countries will lose between one quarter and one third of their skilled and educated population, leading to intersector competition and possibly to a higher public sector wage bill. Botswana is currently obliged to take the unusual measure of importing about 100 teachers from Guyana (Latin America and the Caribbean) each year.

Not surprisingly, all the delegations are preoccupied with this issue, which is central to their planning for school fee abolition. At the macroeconomic level, much work has to be done to bring the attention of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to the rapid evolution of policy with regard to school fee abolition and the very important economic implications for the allocation of resources for the public sector wage bill. Their involvement early in the school fee abolition process was fully recognized by the Nairobi delegations.

Integration with poverty reduction programmes: The decision to abolish school fees must be an integral part of a country's poverty reduction programme, and the steps taken to implement it must be embedded in the PRSP annual action plans. The most obvious reason for this is the high impact on the available funds for poverty reduction and the inherent competition between the education sector and other PRSP priority sectors. The sustainability of school fee abolition must be linked to the overall macroeconomic perspectives and related financing prospects (government resources and external financing).

The PRSP framework offers the significant advantage of high-level support (the Prime Minister's Office in Tanzania, for example) and existence of mechanisms for consulting the people and reporting back to both parliament (or other high authority) and stakeholders. Poverty analysis under the PRSP provides an extensive tool for improving the knowledge base about the characteristics of poor families and their spending decisions. This analysis is fundamental to successfully identifying, consulting and empowering these target groups, and therefore to the design of special programmes to reach those children who will not be reached by school fee abolition alone. (Burundi is working on this task within its PRSP.) Finally, the PRSP provides for the coordination of work on public expenditures and civil service issues to address the inefficiencies in education spending (Kenya), teacher remuneration (DRC and Ghana) and the redeployment of education personnel from urban and administrative posts to the front line.

Planning, monitoring and evaluation: A clear conclusion is that successful school fee abolition depends on education systems improving their planning, monitoring and evaluation systems. Ghana and Tanzania demonstrated the importance of developing a strong technical team to work on an integrated action plan for implementing the reform's various building blocks: human resource planning, programme design (including orphans and vulnerable children and other special groups), infrastructure planning, and the costing and simulation of design alternatives in the light of financial constraints and macroeconomic perspectives. All of these planning activities generate benchmark data and indicators that can be used to chart the path of implementation, with the important potential for expenditures switching within and between programmes. Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya and Tanzania stand out as countries that have used the leverage of high-level political sponsorship under their PRSP to build planning capacity, explore resource requirements and test alternatives against financial constraints, developing viable action plans or road maps for the way forward.

What can we say about monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in the context of our days together and this closing session? We should look at this as the launching of a discussion on M&E, an opening rather than a closing. In fact, we have been discussing M&E all along throughout the week. We all are aware of the importance of using data and information in decision making and programme planning at all stages of the process (sometimes referred to as evidence-based decision making). The children are counting on us to speak and act fairly and responsibly on their behalf, and we cannot do this unless we harness data – creating, promoting and being part of a culture that values data and the use of data to make these most important decisions. What kind of data do we need? We heard this morning about school fee abolition specific indicators. But what are they? Are they different from the universe of indicators that we are already (ideally) monitoring for our ongoing section reform? These would include enrolment/access (with a special focus on vulnerable populations, equity, retention and learning achievement. The list goes on and on around barriers to learning, finance (most definitely knowing where funds are coming from and going to), teachers, decentralization and community participation. Data collection systems, assessments and research activities need to be developed, supported and utilized. Our colleague from Tanzania told me "we jumped in with our feet" – meaning that they just jumped right into fee abolishment. I would add they also jumped with their hearts. We all want to jump with our hearts, but we also need to jump with our heads. The children are counting on us.
Tracy Brunette (USAID)

> *We all have our different roles to play in making real change happen and enabling children to fulfil their right to education, to open the opportunities and choices that education can bring. We hope this Initiative will create a momentum that will lead other countries to abolish school fees.*
> **Janice Dolan** (Save the Children)

The role of civil society: A central and dynamic role in SFAI is carried out by civil society that emcompasses communities, NGOs, parent teacher associations (PTAs as well as teacher's unions. Civil society organizations were working with UNICEF and the World Bank from the beginning to establish SFAI and building support around the Nairobi Workshop. Civil society in Africa was at the forefront of advocating for the elimination of school fees in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and other countries that have eliminated fees in recent years. Civil society organizations in donor countries have increased raised awareness of the problem of school fees and successfully convinced donors to increase targeted funding to school fee elimination. A meeting among civil society groups in Nairobi highlighted the importance of enhancing civil society at two levels: first, in the dialogue around options of implementing school fee abolition (targeting measures, definition of phased reforms); second, in the implementation process, (definition of needs, participation in school management committees, management of school funds, construction of classes, voluntary contributions for maintaining quality, etc.). Looking ahead in the work of SFAI, the upcoming meetings on messaging and communication and on reviewing the draft Operational Guidance in New York will include civil society groups. In addition, civil society intends to activate donor interest and funding in Europe and North America.

VI. SFAI: The Way Forward

In the Workshop's last session on the 'Way Forward', the **SFAI Business Plan** for the coming months was presented and discussed. The **Operational Guidance Paper** that aims to serve as a tool to guide countries in implementing a policy on school fee abolition will be developed during the months of April/May and reviewed at an Expert Meeting on May 23 in New York. Once the final draft is available in mid-June, several consultations at country and regional levels will help to inform the final version. Five **country papers** on experiences in school fee abolition have been developed and discussed in Nairobi (Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Ghana). These will be reviewed in light of the Nairobi discussions and include a chapter on the way forward, indicating how the countries plan to take the lessons learned from the process of exchange and knowledge building within the framework of SFAI to improve national plans and to scale up. The country papers will be consolidated into a book for wider sharing.

The SFAI process and experience to date has underlined the need to develop a **research agenda** as well as an action research program to document and accompany processes of school fee abolition in specific countries. It has been proposed to organize a meeting in this regard next fall and invite key research institutions that can help to define this research agenda and take it forward.

Regarding **engagement with countries for technical and financial support**, a capacity-building strategy will need to be developed, enlisting support by key institutions and including modalities of South-South exchange of expertise and cooperation. Cream Wright (UNICEF) introduced the concept of "accompanying countries" as a guiding principle for technical support. This includes foremost an empathetic relationship with countries and between partners that invests in trust and respect. While the emphasis is always on country leadership and ownership, engagement is active and constructive. Capacity-building is better furthered through 'capacity cultivation', whereby the existing capacities in countries are enhanced. In fact, the Nairobi Workshop demonstrated that South-South cooperation is key to capacity cultivation. Bob Prouty (Acting Head of the FTI) made a presentation on the FTI and its potential to facilitate dialogue and cooperation on school fee abolition. Potential issues of consideration are the revision of EFA FTI plans and indicative framework to take into consideration the abolition of school fees. The FTI could also support filling knowledge gaps in processes of planning and implementation, such as the flow of funds to the school level, low-cost measures of learning outcomes, school mapping, and statistics on vulnerable groups. Resource mobilization should include engagement with the FTI and exploration of alternative modes of financing.

Finally, the SFAI process has underlined the need for defining a **partnership and communication strategy** as the basis for 'building an environment for success' and to ensure coordinated, sustainable support to countries. Partnerships around SFAI should be enlarged and include diverse stakeholders in education and beyond (like HIV/AIDS and child labour networks). The involvement of civil society and the better articulation of their role within a policy framework on school fee abolition is key. A meeting will be convened in London on May 18 to identify key SFAI messages and communications activities with partners that reflect the rationale and objectives of the Initiative. The Seventh Meeting of the Working Group on EFA in Paris July 19-21 and the Sixth High-Level Group Meeting on EFA in Cairo November 14-16 will provide key platforms to move forward on the SFAI Business Plan in terms of consolidated partnerships for bolder action towards EFA and MDGs.

VII. A Reflection on the Nairobi Workshop by Participants

On behalf of country teams (Appreciation from the Floor)**:** Mary Njoroge, Kenyan Director of Basic Education, spoke on behalf of the country teams and captured some of their feedback on the three-day workshop. All countries acknowledged the need to develop solid plans, either before or after declaration of school fee abolition. Countries expressed that the workshop has given them confidence to go back and commit themselves to strengthen their work; for instance, by engaging teachers in the planning of abolition. The topics discussed were very relevant and allowed participants to flesh out issues around implementing the abolition of school fees. Many good practices emerged from the discussions and can be shared with other countries and regions. For example, Ethiopia and Haiti suggested that they can try the financing model being used by Ghana and Kenya, through which banks agree to reduce charges for school accounts. Several country teams expressed the need for an SFAI network to share experiences across countries. The feedback was also positive on the organization and structure of the workshop: Country presentations were thoughtfully prepared, reflecting that clear guidelines were provided; group work was productive and allowed ample time to consolidate the issues.

On behalf other participants: David Gartner from the Global AIDS Alliance reported that the response from participants interviewed about the meeting was generally quite positive. The highlight of the meeting for most participants was the opportunity to learn from the experience across countries in Africa. Participants plan to use the lessons learned in reviewing their education plans. The experience of school finance decentralization and the rapid scaling up of the teaching workforce were of particular interest. One participant referred to the meeting as the best they had ever participated in, while many others found the meeting productive and useful.

A number of suggestions emerged from interviews with participants about how the meeting could be improved in the future. Some suggested that there be additional time and space for the country delegations to make presentations – citing the working groups as sometimes overwhelmed by the interest of delegations in sharing their own experience. Other suggestions included an expanded role for civil society in the formal proceedings and a desire for participation from a wider range of donors in future meetings. The constructive suggestions offered by participants didn't diminish the sense that the meeting had powerfully moved forward the issue of school fee abolition by bringing together diverse constituencies and delegations from across Africa and beyond (Haiti).

VIII. Key Resources and Documents on School Fee Abolition

A full report of the Nairobi Workshop will be available in June 2006.

Table 1. Challenges and Lessons Learned from the Field

Senior education officials from countries that have been through the challenging process of abolishing school fees in sub-Saharan Africa—including Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania – shared their experiences and lessons learned.

Ethiopia: Careful advance planning and capacity building within the overall framework of the PRSP and ESDP were key to successful implementation of school fee abolition. Ethiopia has nine autonomous regions and two city administrations comprising 600 *woredas* (local administrative districts). Convinced that decentralization was key to implementation, the country looked to its high-profile Ministry of Capacity Building to strengthen administration at the regional, *woreda* and school levels, with special focus on the Education and Training Boards and school management committees (comprising the local administrators, school principals, Parent Teacher Association representatives and teachers). Schools have complete freedom to administer funds. They are also empowered to adapt their curriculum and timetable to local conditions – employing the local language (24 languages are used during instruction in Ethiopia's primary schools) and taking into account the agricultural and livestock calendars (thus reducing the impact of opportunity costs).

A key feature of Ethiopia's advance planning was the integration of school fee abolition into the Education and Training Policy of the Country in 1994 and later into the PRSP policy (as of 2002) and decision-making framework. This planning included collaboration with the Education and Finance Ministries on the simulation of the financial impact of the additional costs due to increased enrolments, using several models, including the World Bank simulation model. These simulations informed the policy debate and made it possible to articulate financing requirements with domestic revenue and external financing prospects. An important complementary tool was a subsidy budget allocation formula that used district-level development indicators to ensure equitable budget allocations to schools. Additionally, simple tools were developed to facilitate decision making by school management committees.

Looking back at the experience, the delegation also singled out good communication and consultation, and the empowerment of local communities as keys to success. Communities may still raise funds for education, provided that costs do not limit access by the poorest. School construction and maintenance are still community responsibilities, but the Government gives support to poor communities that cannot afford to do so.

Ghana: The delegation attributes successful implementation to careful advance planning and to the piloting of school fee abolition, as well as the introduction of capitation grants for schools in 40 districts. At the policy inception, the first step was to establish a high-level think tank and a steering committee (education, finance and local government) to assess the long-term financial requirements stemming from the anticipated surge in enrolment. By using a phased approach that targeted the 40 most-deprived districts before scaling to the national level, Ghana managed to avoid a sudden extreme surge in enrolment. In addition, the pilot provided an opportunity to fine-tune the procedure for the allocation of funds to schools, clarify management roles of head teachers and school management committees, and link release of capitation grants with approved school performance improvement plans. The pilot has also been crucial in finalizing simple and straightforward capitation grant guidelines, which were widely disseminated before the scheme was brought to national scale in 2005.

Recognizing the importance of adequate numbers of teachers, properly deployed, the committee recently commissioned a human resource audit. The key findings were that too many teachers were assigned to urban areas and to non-teaching posts. Another audit took stock of physical infrastructure and future classroom needs, identifying capital investment as a major constraint. The delegation feels that the exercise would not have been possible without a sector-wide approach. Specifically, a special effort has been made to achieve efficiencies at all levels of the education system, together with cost sharing for programmes with a high private rate of return (upper secondary, TVET and university studies). School fee abolition and introduction of capitation grants also forced Ghana to examine how it could better mobilize domestic financial resources. As a result, the decision was taken to allocate 20 per cent of the proceeds of the Value-Added Tax to an education fund.

Finally, the delegation recognizes infrastructure as a continuing constraint. Financing by Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative funds and the Social Development Fund cannot keep pace with the need for new schools, let alone tackle the backlog of rehabilitation and maintenance (for which costs fall on local communities). Ghana looks to the donors for enhanced support in this area.

Kenya: The delegation emphasized that a prime requirement for school fee abolition was careful advance planning, integrated with the PRSP and the ESDP. Economic and financial analysis using Kenya's own simulation model had been key to formulation of the school fee abolition policy within the overall sector development programme. Budget support for the programme was financed by quick-disbursing International Development Association Credits (2000–2004), together with strong bilateral support for specific programmes (such as orphans and vulnerable children), which covered the costs of the expanded enrolment through universal capitation grants for books and materials and selective infrastructure grants based on the needs of the poorest communities.

The heart of Kenya's programme is the direct allocation of funds to local schools, or capitation grants, to replace fee revenue and meet increased costs due to the major increase in enrolment (1.4 million in 2002–2003). School management committees have their own bank accounts into which the capitation grants are deposited. The committees are permitted to spend in line with a negative list and in respect of a positive list (the 'Orange Book') for textbooks. They are trained in basic accounting, and a detailed implementation manual has been developed after careful field testing. The manual is an integral part of the implementation arrangements for the disbursement of the International Development Association Credits and is endorsed by the donors.

Kenya is keenly aware of the impending pressures of increased primary school enrolment and throughput on lower secondary and upper secondary levels in the near future. The country is already planning for these new surges in expenditure by mobilizing domestic resources through more efficient spending and cost sharing in other levels of the school system. Kenya's domestic resources already meet a high percentage of the operating costs of basic education. Parents and communities continue to share the costs of uniforms, school construction and maintenance.

Malawi: The country pioneered school fee abolition in 1994, but not without human cost. The delegation noted that this decision created opportunities for many children to go to school, and that the current high net enrolment rate is one of the positive developments. Malawi is on course to realize the MDG of universal primary education. The delegation recounted the difficulties created by the May 1994 decision to implement school fee abolition in the following school year (1994–1995), as this did not allow for planning. Some 22,000 teachers had to be identified and sent out to schools with limited training or orientation, sometimes lasting just two weeks.

Many children dropped out of school in the first year of school fee abolition. There was inadequate time and capacity to procure additional books or to launch a school construction programme. Even if school construction was fully financed, new classrooms would have taken two years to build, to provide the local construction industry with adequate time to respond to the challenge.

Overcrowded classrooms, inadequately prepared teachers and the lack of instructional materials combined to lower the quality of education. Malawi had an open door policy that permitted learners of any age to enroll in primary school, and no children were forced to wait – resulting in the enrolment surge. Malawi was further handicapped by the failure of the international community to provide assistance, despite the proclamations at the Jomtien Conference held three years earlier.

The delegation noted that although there have been significant improvements some of the effects are still being felt more than 10 years later. Almost 10 per cent of eligible children are still out of school (although these are mostly the hard-to-reach orphans and vulnerable children, children with special learning needs, and girls – categories that require other initiatives). However, good progress is now being made through the greater collaboration between the Government and development partners.

Mozambique: The decision to proceed with school fee abolition was taken with little time for advance planning. The delegation felt that piloting was impractical because it would delay meeting the expectations of the public and would create tensions. The decision was implemented gradually, so the consequences were chronic shortages of teachers and other resources, rather than a major shock to the school system. A complicating factor, however, was the challenge of merging a two-tier basic education system into a single unified structure. Faced with these difficulties and given its high dependence on external aid, financial constraints oblige communities to continue to raise funds for their schools, though not to the exclusion of poor students. School uniforms and school maintenance still remain a parent/community responsibility, (although school uniforms are not mandatory). The March 2006 decision by the UK to increase its funding for fee-free basic education is likely to benefit Mozambique as a Commonwealth-affiliated country.

In terms of maintaining quality, the delegation felt that the use of local languages has been very positive, as has the decentralized system of pedagogical support to educators (Zonas de Influencia Pedagogica). Important challenges remain to quality, due to the impact of HIV/AIDS on the teaching force, and to providing social safety nets for orphaned and other vulnerable children so they may attain their right to education.

Tanzania: The delegation stressed the need for a long lead time for planning school fee abolition. In 2001, in the face of increasing poverty and a steep decline in the enrolment of eligible children in primary schools as a result of user fees and related contributions, the Government decided to reverse its fee policy and respond to increased demand and improve quality by transferring funds to schools for operating costs and for infrastructure.

With the commitment of the donors and the World Bank to finance a primary education development programme through a sector adjustment credit, the Prime Minister's Office worked with the donors and the concerned ministries (finance, education and local government) to determine the level of the capitation grant (recurrent expenditures) and development grants (school construction and equipment). This process utilized the World Bank education simulation model to evaluate the financial impact of different configurations of inputs to be financed and to determine required levels of support. The ability to simulate different policy options in real time kept the ongoing discussion informed and transparent – and proved particularly useful in presenting education's brief to the finance ministry. This productive debate led to the development of a phased implementation plan taking into account the forecasted surge in demand.

The delegation reported that the factors contributing to successful implementation of school fee abolition included: political will and support; lessons learned from earlier reform attempts; Government ownership of the ESDP; in-depth analysis of policy options and their financial impact; and the ability to design robust systems and procedures for the decentralization of expenditures to the school level, as a result of analytical work in educational administration and public sector management. Finally, the coordinated financial and technical support of the local donor partnership was an essential condition for success.

Key challenges that remain are the lag in providing adequate housing for teachers, sustainable supply of adequate and appropriate teaching and learning materials, sanitation and clean water and, as in Mozambique, moving towards an age-appropriate primary school through the establishment of a complementary programme for older students.

Table 2. Reactions of Countries Recently Implementing or about to Implement School Fee Abolition The three countries represented benefited from the country work groups and presentations, which fueled their individual discussion groups.
Burundi: The planning process is well under way and school fee abolition will be implemented with the new school year in October 2006. The initiative is an integral part of the PRSP action plan and has the full support of the donors. Burundi has identified its likely expansion needs in terms of teachers (2,790) and of infrastructure. It has also identified the number of orphans and vulnerable children to be served through a special programme designed to complement the initiative. Given Burundi's severely constrained Government funding, families and communities will continue to make some contributions – for pedagogical materials and for auxiliary staff salaries such as night-time security guards. The Government prepared an emergency plan to respond to the surge in enrolment that followed the declaration in August 2005 of a Free Primary Education policy. The plan was presented to a Donors Conference in February this year, with the support of Burundi's major partners, including UNICEF, the World Bank, the Department for International Development (UK), Belgium Cooperation, French Cooperation and the European Union, as well as the Burundi NGO Network. The Government is preparing an Education Sector Development Plan as part of the PRSP formulation exercise currently under way. The PRSP will be presented to a donor conference in September. Burundi also seeks to reduce the unit cost of books and materials to make contributions more effective. Funds to compensate for fee revenue and to meet expansion will be channelled to schools, with oversight by school management committees.
Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): The Government's declaration to abolish school fees before studying the impact on the country's current education context revealed that this type of initiative should be an incremental process – one that first takes into consideration the issue of teachers' salaries and compensation. Half of teacher salaries are supported by school fees, so teachers who feared a loss of income went on strike. An audit of teachers and other staff is under way as part of the overall civil service review. This review will be the platform for negotiating teacher salaries at a level compatible with DRC's ability to meet its public payroll. The importance of replacing the fee share of teacher salaries and paying for new teachers is critical to the success of overall reform, especially at the primary school level. Consequently, the Government plans to make teachers' salaries a key component of the Public Expenditure Tracking Survey; to develop oversight mechanisms at the school and community levels (Parent Teacher Associations and local government councils); to monitor teacher payments, motivation and attendance; to conduct periodic audits of salary expenditures; and to inform the public of these measures, reporting to both Parliament and civil society. The DRC delegation rejected the idea of a pilot approach as long as the Government announcement is countrywide. Identifying pilot provinces to test the 'free-fee schools' programme will be difficult because the needs are huge and similar everywhere. Moreover, pilot projects could be misinterpreted at the political level. An inventory of school buildings has been conducted, and the pending budget support through International Development Association Credit will help DRC bridge its financial gap for teacher

salaries and pedagogical materials. The Credit will also directly finance a new teacher training institution and the rehabilitation of the education infrastructure. Meeting infrastructure needs will be an enormous challenge in this vast country and will depend to a large extent on continuing confessional support. School fee abolition is a key component of the PRSP action plan and progress will be annually reviewed by the Government and donors, notably via the World Bank/International Monetary Fund annual Joint Staff Note.

Haiti: Haiti faces more than the issue of abolishing school fees. It must rebuild the education sector. The newly elected president stated that his government will assign a special priority to universal access to quality schooling. Private schools currently represent 85 per cent of the education offer and public schools (not entirely free) only 15 per cent. Because around 2.5 million children between 5 and 15 years old (40 per cent of this age group) do not attend school due to poverty and/or vulnerability, public education must be significantly reinforced.

Haiti needs to set feasible targets (how many pupils to be incorporated, and how many teachers, classrooms, books and supplies will be needed); define an appropriate strategy of implementation (which is likely to focus on a phased approach); and obtain external financial resources, as well as implement a strategy to progressively increase domestic resources for education. It must also develop capacity for education planners, administrators and teachers' training. The Haiti delegation rejected the notion of a pilot approach – children can no longer wait – so the phasing of implementation will most likely be determined purely by financial ability.

Haiti's plan considers both the public and the private sector as a whole in order to achieve universal quality education. It will try to ensure balanced development of both sectors by setting educational, physical and sanitary standards applicable to both. Haiti's preparation of its ESDP is an integral part of the country's PRSP.