COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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PTOM 18
COASI 68
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“IA” ITEM NOTE

From: Working Party on Development Cooperation
To: COREPER/Council
No. prev. doc.: 6960/11
Subject: Special Report No 12/2010 concerning the EU Development Assistance for Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia
- Draft Council Conclusions

1. On 23 February 2011, the General Secretariat of the Council received Special Report No 12/2010 concerning the EU Development Assistance for Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.¹

2. Pursuant to the rules laid down in the Council Conclusions on improving the examination of special reports drawn up by the Court of Auditors², the Permanent Representatives Committee instructed the Working Party on Development Cooperation to examine this report and to draw the relevant conclusions.³

¹ Doc. 6960/11 FIN 117 DEVGEN 49 ACP 50 PTOM 11 COASI 39.
² Doc. 7515/00 FIN 127 + COR 1.
³ Doc. 6961/11 FIN 118 DEVGEN 50 ACP 51 PTOM 12 COASI 40.
3. The Working Party reached agreement on the draft Council Conclusions at annex.

4. The Permanent Representatives Committee is invited to recommend that the Council adopt these Conclusions as an "A" item of the agenda at a forthcoming meeting.
ANNEX

DRAFT

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

on

Special Report No 12/2010 concerning the EU Development Assistance for Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia

I. Introduction

1. The Council welcomes the Court of Auditors’ Special Report No 12/2010 concerning the EU Development Assistance for Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia and the Commission's replies.

2. The Court’s audit assessed whether EU development assistance in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia has helped achieve the three objectives of:
   a. ensuring primary education for all children,
   b. eliminating gender inequalities and
   c. improving education quality.
3. Like the Court, the Council underlines the fact that improving the availability and quality of education is a major factor in the global fight against poverty, reflected in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) goals. The Council recalls that the European Consensus on Development identified 'human development', including education, as one of nine areas where the Commission would be primarily active. Particular priorities in education include quality primary education, vocational training and addressing inequalities. The Council is looking forward to the Commission developing, in close coordination with the Member States, a comprehensive EU approach for the whole sector, building on the Staff Working Document “More and better education in developing countries” on basic education issued in February 2010.

II. General remarks

4. The Council notes the Court’s assessment that in the field of the EU’s development assistance for basic education in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia significant progress has been made. While ‘only 45 % of the targets in the audited financing agreements were fully achieved’, the Court also noted that ‘a further 30 % of the indicators were making progress’. The Council notes that:

a. regarding the goal of ensuring primary education for all children, only some of the intended improvements were achieved and progress has in general been too slow to ensure that targets for 2015 will be met. However, in many cases the results achieved are evidence of unprecedented progress in some of the world's poorest countries in a short time-frame;

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3 The Court of Auditors Special Report gives an overall assessment that 45% of targets have been fully achieved and 30% partially achieved. On the objective of 'ensuring primary education for all children', point 22 states that 44% of targets have been 'fully met to date, and progress was made in a further 37% of targets'.
b. as regards eliminating gender disparity in education there was more success, although the overall figures mask significant inequalities within regional and social groups;
c. concerning the third priority goal, improving education quality, few of the intended improvements were achieved.

5. The Council is pleased to see that the Commission acknowledges that more effort is needed to improve education quality. It is encouraging that the Commission, in close partnership with EU Member States, is now strengthening the impact of EU development assistance for basic education in developing countries. The Council is aware of the fact that improving education quality (learning outcomes) is a difficult and long-term process and an even greater challenge in countries with high demographic growth.

III. Recommendations

6. The Council considers the answer of the Commission adequate. It welcomes the fact that the Commission accepts the Court's recommendations in general and that it has already begun to take some measures to act on them. The Council takes note of the Court's recommendations to the Commission which is invited to:
   a. review the effect of the increased use of General Budget Support (GBS) in sub-Saharan Africa with regard to the overall development assistance for education, and consider whether adjustments to future programming are needed;
   b. ensure that future development assistance to education focuses - to a greater extent than in the past - on the quality of education and the capacity of beneficiary governments to cope with increases in school enrolment;
   c. update and expand the relevant guidelines for education covering all aid delivery methods relevant for the sector, including projects, pooled funding and budget support, in a comprehensive manner covering the following issues:
• in what situations is it advisable to apply budget support to enhance education outcomes;
• how to carry out education policy dialogue where general budget support is the only aid delivery method concerned with education;
• how to choose and design relevant performance indicators for education in budget support;
• how to carry out sector performance review in the sectoral budget support context;

d. systematically use a combination of aid delivery methods, and in particular consider running a number of projects and programmes to promote local knowledge, to improve monitoring, and to benefit from non-state actors’ ability to innovate and to provide for hard-to-reach children;

e. promote sector-specific public financial management reviews (and the use of Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys and other monitoring tools) and play a full part in donor education working groups where monitoring can be coordinated and supplemented, where appropriate, with independent monitoring processes;

f. ensure better alignment of different donors’ requirements concerning the reporting formats and performance criteria to be used for government reporting in the education sector, where education is a focal sector and where general budget support is provided.

IV. The Way Forward

7. In conclusion, the Council is pleased to see that in its responses, the Commission:

a. acknowledges that more effort is needed to improve education quality and is working to address this in partnership with EU Member States. The Council recalls that achieving universal primary education implies that all girls and boys should be able to attend school and complete a full cycle of primary education;
b. concerning, in particular, education expertise, acknowledges that there are staffing gaps in some delegations, and has mandated several delegations to make agreements under the EU ‘division of labour’ (DoL) policy to delegate ‘sector policy dialogue’ to an EU Member State, where they have the relevant sectoral expertise, and is examining options to strengthen the Commission's in-house expertise, including in the EU delegations, as recommended in the Court of Auditor’s report;

c. emphasises the importance of identifying indicators and setting realistic but also sufficiently ambitious targets together with the partner country, taking into account the country context;

d. has decided to make best use of the opportunities offered by the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action for a harmonised approach to capacity development, including through the Commission's new technical cooperation strategy;

e. has agreed on the need to pay more attention to the quality of education and has already taken steps to address the issue, notably through the Staff Working Document ‘More and better education in developing countries’, issued in February 2010. In this context, the Council calls on the Commission to ensure that appropriate civil society accountability mechanisms are included in monitoring of all relevant instruments of support to the education sector;  

f. has begun to review and adapt the general guidance available for ‘programme and project cycle management’, expected at the end of 2012, following one year of internal consultation and testing with EU delegations;

g. agrees to promote sector-specific public finance management (PFM) work wherever possible within the context of sector policy support programmes (SPSP);

h. agrees to continue increasing the alignment of donor monitoring and reporting systems.

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4 Commission Staff Working Document - More and Better Education in Developing Countries, 5.2.2010 (6142/10) page 20.