

Education Strategy  
for Finland's Development Cooperation



Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland



# Preface

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The principal aim of Finland's development policy is to remove extreme poverty from the world. A high standard of education is a central precondition and fundamental element of a well-functioning national economy. The provision of education is one of the most effective measures that can contribute to poverty reduction and as such a worthwhile investment.

Basic education is also a human right. Every child, young person and adult has the right to learning. At the moment, about 100 million school-age children have no access to basic education. Therefore, Finland has adopted the promotion of education, particularly basic education, as one of its central development policy goals. This goal also contributes to the attainment of the first Millennium Development Goal, which is to halve the proportion of people who suffer from extreme poverty and hunger by 2015.

Finland's own development is grounded on the provision of education in the mother tongue and, based on it, on equal opportunities of success in society. The possibility to get basic education has been guaranteed long ago in Finland regardless of residence, financial means and any other background of the child. We believe that Finland, relying on its experiences in the education sector, can bring added value to the development of education in the partner countries.

In its development policy, Finland has undertaken to pursue the MDGs. Two of the MDGs, universal primary education and the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2015, are the principal goals from the point of view of the education sector. Furthermore, the interests of the education sector are closely related to the other MDGs, too. There is clearly positive interaction between education and productivity, between education and food security, and between education and health.

The education sector is one of the priorities of Finland's development cooperation. The main goal, universal basic education and equal access to education, is pursued by supporting the partner countries' sectoral programmes, regional and bilateral projects and the processes that are the most important from the point of view of the MDGs. Bilateral cooperation in the education sector is under way in 13 countries, five of which are long-term partner countries. A major part of the resources are channelled via NGOs.

This Education Strategy for Finland's Development Cooperation has been formulated to steer both present and future cooperation in the field. The Education Strategy is based on the Development Policy, the Finnish National Education for All Action Plan, and the Millennium Declaration. It provides the key guidelines that must be specified in greater detail in the cooperation at the country and organisation levels.

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# Introduction

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Finland's own development is firmly based on the provision of primary education in the children's own mother tongue and on equality of opportunity in terms of access to further education and employment. The possibility to get basic education was guaranteed very early in the history of Finland - in all parts of the country regardless of the financial circumstances of the family or any other background of the child. Finland emphasises the partner countries' accountability to their own citizens for achieving the goal of universal primary education for all. In addition, we believe that the Finnish education experience can bring added value to the processes and pursuits of our partner countries.

Finland has ranked very high in many international comparative assessments of country performance. Two surveys that are the most relevant ones for the education sector are the OECD/PISA (Programme of International Student Achievement) study and the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. In the last two PISA surveys, Finland has come out top and in the corruption survey Finland was ranked as the least corrupt country in the world in 2004 and as the second least corrupt country in 2005. These two comparative surveys are also referred to in a recent evaluation of the education sector cooperation, which encourages Finland to take advantage of the internationally recognised strengths of its education system, and to make itself clearly heard in international dialogue in the education sector. (See Sack, R, Cross, M, & Moulton, J. Evaluation of Finnish Education Sector Development Cooperation. <http://global.finland.fi/evaluations/education.pdf>)

In international efforts to reduce poverty and in the related development dialogue, the importance of primary education is emphasised. Of the eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), two are directly related to education: Number 2. Achieve universal primary education, and Number 3. Promote gender equality and empower women, which includes gender equality in education. Success requires balanced development throughout the entire education sector. The Education for All - Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) discussions, and the parameters set under the initiative, provide a useful framework for the development of education at different levels.

The Government Resolution on Finnish Development Policy, adopted on 5 February 2004, specifies a number of special strengths that Finland has in development cooperation and in the ongoing dialogue on development. The Development Policy advocates the inclusion of Finnish added value in development cooperation. The education sector has been found to be one of Finland's strengths. As an actor in the practical development cooperation, Finland has, in many countries and in many international forums in recent years, gained a high profile as a country which promotes the educational opportunities of children and young people with disabilities as well as other pupils who are in need of special support.

# I Principles: The Basis for Development Policy

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Finland's development cooperation in the field of education is based on the guidelines laid down in international agreements and treaties, on the one hand, and in Finland's own national Development Policy and the Finnish National Education for All Action Plan (Finnish Commission for UNESCO Publication No. 18) on the other.

From the point of view of the education sector, the most important international agreements and processes in the work to eradicate poverty are: the UN Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG 2 and MDG 3, see above) and the Education for All process. The practical implementation of Finland's develop-

ment cooperation is influenced and directed by the ongoing harmonisation work in this area carried out within the OECD Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC).

In the European Union, two documents form the basis for the development policy in the education sector: The Communication from the European Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Education and Training in the Context of Poverty Reduction in Developing Countries, 6 March 2002; and The EU Development Council Resolution 30 May 2002. Finland has contributed to the content of these documents, and the Education Strategy for Finland's

Development Cooperation is in line with these EU documents.

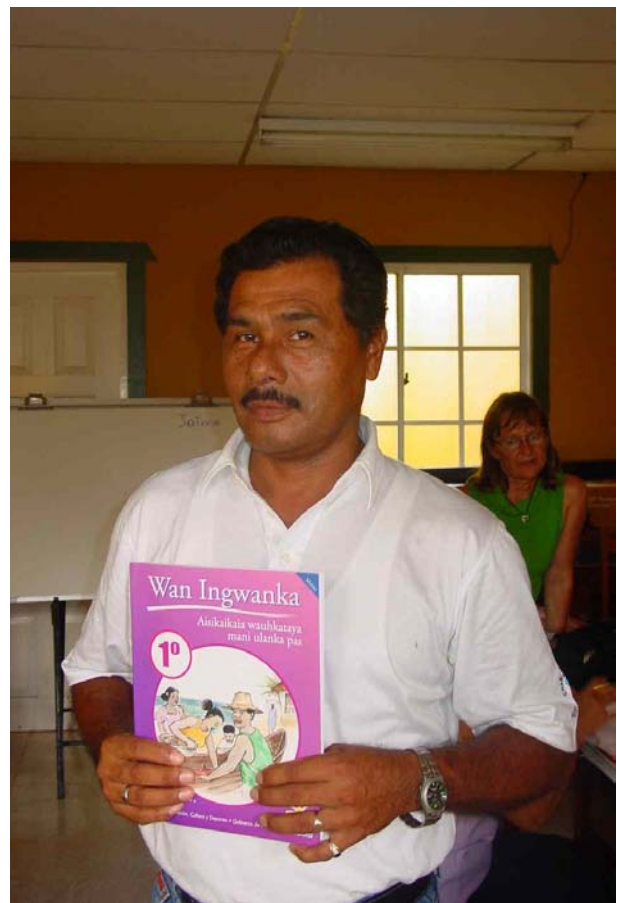
At the national level, the Development Policy Decisions in Principle of 1996, 1998, and 2001 have influenced the allocation of funds and shaped the content and forms of support in the education sector. These policy papers have emphasised the central role of the Education for All process. The Development Policy of 2004 highlights the goal of poverty reduction and gives priority to the provision of primary education.

As is noted in the Development Policy, Finland's support to the partner countries is based on each country's own poverty reduction strategy and development plans. Finland requires the integration of the education policies and education sector development plans into the broader framework of national Poverty Reduction Strategies.

Finland's Development Policy gives special priority to the following education-related themes: universal primary education for all and, in particular, the promotion of girls' school attendance; better quality of teaching and improved learning outcomes; higher demand for education; inclusive education. Finland has considerable experience of and know-how in these areas.

The promotion of the rights and the status of women and girls, and the promotion of the rights of marginalised groups are cross-cutting themes stressed in Finland's Development Policy. They are pursued by means of promoting equal access to education and undertaking special measures to develop the education of children and young persons with disabilities and the educational conditions of indigenous peoples.

Finland emphasises the right to education and learning. All children and young persons should have the possibility to attend basic education. For the poorest social groups, the main barrier to school attendance is the cost of schooling. Direct costs, such as compulsory school fees and books and materials and school uniforms, are prohibitively high for the poorest groups. Finland makes every effort in all of its development cooperation in the education sector to contribute to the provision of free basic education for all children. At the secondary and tertiary levels of education,



fees – which can be equalised, for example, by offering a system of scholarships and allowances – may be justified. Even then, it is important to find ways to ensure that pupils from the poorest social classes have the opportunity to attend secondary school. Special efforts must be made at all educational levels to ensure that girls have the possibility to attend school.

Finland emphasises the right to instruction in the primary education in the child's mother tongue. The question is to a large extent one of political will, but it is also linked to education policy and often to technical problems. The question of the language of instruction and learning has a direct connection to the quality of teaching and to learning outcomes.

Finland promotes the education of children and young persons with disabilities in all development cooperation. As regards children who need special support, Finland seeks to promote an inclusive approach to education.

## II Priority Areas

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The priority areas in Finland's development cooperation in the field of education, as listed on page 9 of the Development Policy (2004), are:

- ensuring basic education for all, and especially promoting the education of girls;
- improving the quality of teaching and of learning results;
- increasing the demand for education; and
- inclusive education.

Consistent with the Millennium Development Goals, Finland emphasises primary education that is universal, free and of high quality. In this connection, special emphasis is placed on the importance of educating girls as a significant means of breaking the vicious circle of poverty. Finland emphasises the responsibility of governments and other public authorities in the provi-

sion of education. To contribute to the goal of reducing poverty, a greater share of Finland's support for the education sector will be channelled to basic education.

An increase of the number of pupils in primary schools, i.e. quantitative growth, does not automatically improve the quality of teaching and learning outcomes. The quality of education depends primarily on the skills and attitudes of teachers, the content of the curriculum, and the teaching materials available. Finland places a great deal of emphasis on activities that support a high quality of education, especially teacher training and assessment of learning outcomes. Finland pays special attention to the linkages between evaluation, research and development of education, and emphasises learner-centred approaches.





Many of the barriers to learning have their origins outside the educational system itself. For example, local ways and other cultural factors may prevent girls from being allowed to attend school. Extreme poverty may force parents to make their children to seek paid employment, and investing in education is not always considered to be worthwhile. Finland seeks to address these and similar problems that have an effect on the demand for education by means of engaging in cooperation with other sectors and by jointly pursuing themes related to education. Education for All places strong emphasis on an equal right of access to education by all. In some countries, less than one percent of school-age children with disabilities actually attend school. Special schools are few and far between and it is scarcely realistic to assume that the network would extend everywhere in poor circumstances. Schools must be flexible, resourceful and capable of addressing diversity and various learning needs.

Another easily overlooked group is ethnic minorities. In many countries, the language of education in the schools is different from the language used in the homes and communities. Experience has unequivocally shown that the

best results in education are obtained when the language of instruction is the children's mother tongue. Good results require competent teachers and good learning materials in the language of the children. Many countries have taken the first steps towards providing basic education in the pupils' home language. The question of bilingualism and multilingualism are becoming more and more important in development policy and education policy dialogue. Finland emphasises the necessity of providing educational opportunities in the children's own mother tongue with appropriate regard for their local culture.

Developments in the information and communications technology (ICT) are also taken into consideration in the work in the education sector. There is a two-way connection between education and ICT. The new technology can be used to improve the services provided by the education sector, and the use of ICT, especially the Internet, opens up new possibilities for distance learning, particularly in teacher training and in secondary and university education. Furthermore, education and training are necessary to meet the capacity building needs of many other fields and the information society in general.

## III Channels and Instruments

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In providing support to the priority areas specified above, Finland's efforts focus on key strategic areas of educational policy and its implementation. The effects of Finnish support at the national, regional and organisational levels, and progress in the implementation of the programmes and projects that are supported are followed using state-of-the-art monitoring, administrative and evaluation methods and systems. The importance of harmonisation is emphasised in all activities.

### **Bilateral development cooperation**

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In 2005, Finland supported the education sector in 13 countries, of which five are Finland's long-

term partner countries. In addition, support was channelled through regional programmes. The following is a presentation of the various forms of support and the various programmes and projects that are supported. The projects and programmes that are referred to are only examples of Finnish cooperation.

### **A. Long-term Partner Countries**

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Bilateral development cooperation is based on the partner countries' own poverty reduction strategies. The strategies are then used as the basis for development programmes in the education sector, and further for the formulation of the plans

to implement them. When providing support for the development plans in a partner country, Finland emphasises the share of basic education in the overall plan. The EFA/FTI parameters provide a useful framework for dialogue on these development plans.

The EFA/FTI indicative benchmarks include the following:

- Public expenditure on education as a share of total public expenditure: 20%
- Basic education's share of total education recurrent spending: 50% (if cycle 6 years)
- The average pay per teacher is 3.5 times the per-capita GDP
- The pupil-teacher ratio 1:40
- Spending on school inputs other than teachers as the share of total recurrent spending on basic education: 33%
- Repetition rate among primary school pupils less than 10%
- Annual instructional hours per child: 850
- The unit cost for school construction 10,000 USD per school

In the cooperation with the long-term partner countries, the development policy goal is to move from traditional project support to programme-based support and to direct budget support. A gradual transfer in this direction has already been underway in the education sector for several years and will evidently continue to be the dominant trend. In the long-term partner countries, Finland supports the education sector primarily through jointly funded programmes. Depending on the country, the model used is either direct budget support, sector-specific budget support, 'earmarked' budget support or off-budget basket funding.

In addition to the above-mentioned general line of funding, technical support may be provided for the programmes in general or channelled to specific themes or processes as the need arises.

In accordance with the distribution of labour and as required in connection with processes carried out by a partner country, Finland can moni-

tor and/or coordinate the sector's donor cooperation, or take responsibility for some other more specific theme or sub-sector. Active participation is the only way to exercise influence and to bring to the process the Finnish added value, which is called for in the Finnish Development Policy.

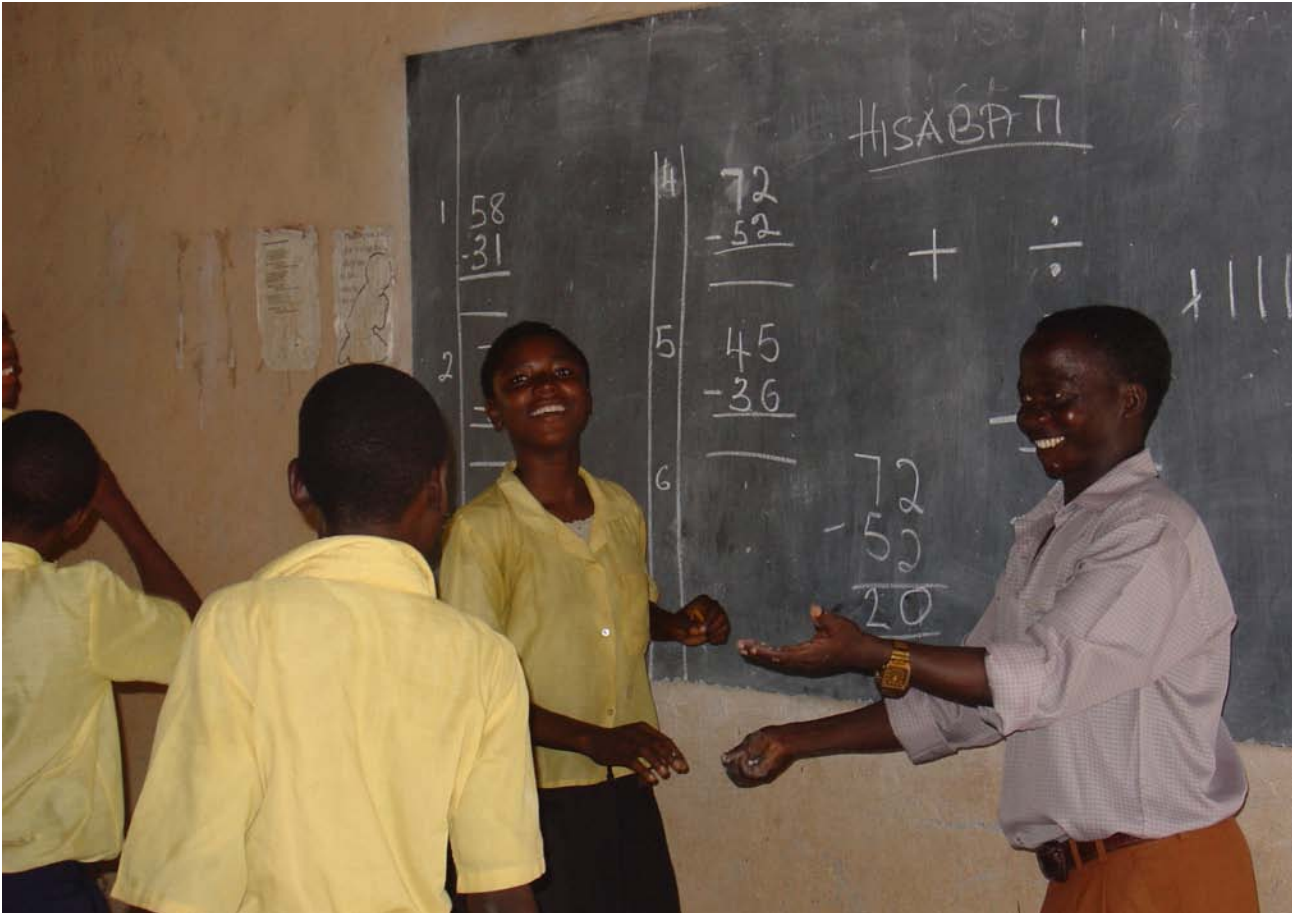
At present, Finland is supporting development in the education sector in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nepal, Tanzania, and Zambia. In addition to financial support, Finland actively engages in sector dialogue. In setting forth the terms of reference for any possible technical support, the principles of the Code of Conduct appended to the Communication of the European Commission, dated 6 March 2002, are applied.

## B. Other Countries

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Finnish support for the education sector of countries other than the long-term partner countries is based on the countries' own or regional strategies and the Finnish Foreign Ministry's strategy for the country or region. The principal development policy goal is - also in these countries - the reduction of poverty, which is why each country's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) forms the central framework for fixed-term cooperation with that country. On account of the special requirements of different countries and regions, other goals, such as reconstruction and the promotion of peace, the rights of indigenous peoples, the development of democracy, and so on, will also guide Finnish support. The primary instrument in these countries in the near future will be continued use of the project model. Even then it is important to ensure that the goals and activities are completely consistent with the plans and wishes of the country or region and form a part of the sectoral policy and its implementation in that country.

Palestine and South Africa have been Finland's development partners in the education sector for over a decade. In both these two countries, the main theme is the creation of a new, democratic school system and the strengthening of this system. In South Africa, Finland already supports the national programmes. In Palestine, sup-



port continues in the form of projects. Alongside programmes and projects, Finland is also investigating possibilities for the promotion of more intensive participation of Finnish institutions in development cooperation in this sector.

### C. Regional Support

In the category 'other countries', Finland is looking into opportunities for moving from bilateral projects aimed at only one country to an overall support for the region as a whole. In Central America and the Andean Region, this has already taken place. Using the bilateral, bilingual education projects in Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Guatemala as a basis, regional programmes on the same theme have been started in Central America and in the Andean Region. In Western Balkans, the themes of bilateral projects have been teacher training and inclusive education, linked with the countries' education policy reforms. Grant aid in

its present form for countries in Western Balkans will be phased out in 2007. Finland is investigating possibilities for supporting the sector through regional programmes.

The regional projects aim at strengthening the more general regional integration process and the related institutions.

According to the Development Policy, Finland will engage in strategic partnerships with certain international NGOs in order to strengthen certain central themes identified in the Development Policy. The greatest challenges for development in the education sector lie in Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition to the bilateral efforts, Finland supports the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) as the umbrella organisation for networking in the education sector in Africa. By means of supporting the Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE), Finland seeks to promote gender equality in the sector. These two strategic partnerships

are supported both financially and by contributing Finnish know-how and expertise.

### EU Cooperation

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Finland actively participates in the European Union's Education Experts meetings, and closely follows the activities described in the Communication on Education and Poverty. At the country level and particularly in Finland's long-term partner countries, Finland seeks to influence the direction of the EU Commission's education sector support, as well as to ensure the effective and efficient use of this support. At the decision making level, the EDF, MED, and ALA committees are the most important channels.

### Multilateral Cooperation

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Even though the main emphasis in development cooperation in the education sector, in terms of quantitative indicators, is on bilateral cooperation and country level dialogue is most central, multilateral activities form a very important forum for this sector.

Finland engages in dialogue on international development by means of being active in the boards of multinational organisations and institutions and taking an active part in strategically central processes.

Finland develops its cooperation with and support for multilateral organisations that play a key role in the monitoring and follow-up of the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In the cooperation with these multilateral organisations, Finland provides direct support for programmes that aim at achieving the MDGs. In the education sector, the most important organisations are the World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF. Through the World Bank, Finland supports the global activities of the EFA/Fast Track Initiative. Through UNESCO, Finland together with the other Nordic countries supports the Education for All (EFA) process by assisting in the building of national administration and planning capacities. UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) plays a central role here.

Through UNICEF, Finland supports the global programme for education for girls, which is needed to achieve MDG 3. In addition to funding, Finland provides technical assistance especially by seconding junior programme officers to the programmes of the aforementioned organisations.

### NGOs

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A significant part of Finnish NGOs' development cooperation is targeted at the education sector.

Work in an NGO gives many active citizens possibilities of personal participation in and establishment of contacts with development cooperation. NGOs possess a considerable amount of expertise in different sub-sectors, which can be utilized in development work. NGO activities in fields dominated by public sector activities form a challenge to both sides. One of the requirements of projects supported by Finland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs is that the project activities take into account the official development and educational policy plans of the country in question. It is desirable that the Ministry's support to NGOs helps countries to achieve their set goals and supports local preconditions for providing education and attending school in as sustainable manner as possible.

Cooperation with partner countries' local organisations is crucial; it strengthens civil society participation and encourages exercise of influence in the development of the countries. Local organisations can also be effective 'watchdogs' and see to it that the matters closest to their own hearts are paid attention to and taken into consideration in e.g. sectoral programme planning and monitoring. Finland seeks to support cooperation with and among NGOs, national education authorities, and other national administrative bodies.

### Research

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To succeed with their reform programmes, developing countries need up-to-date information based on research to be able to make informed decisions. The majority of the research dealing

with questions concerning education in developing countries has been conducted in the industrialised countries. New information may have been obtained, but the local research capacity is under-developed. Finland has raised the question of research in the discussions concerning Finnish support and the directions this support should take. Rather than supporting individual researchers, Finland lays the main emphasis on supporting institutions and developing networks.

Finnish researchers, universities, and institutes of higher education are encouraged to engage in development cooperation in their own areas of expertise based on reciprocity. The possibility of expanding the term of the current North-South Mobility programme, now in its pilot phase, will be decided on the basis of an evaluation to be made in 2006.

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### Resources

While Finland concentrates its support on no more than three sectors in each country and the amount of Finnish appropriations grows, the volume of development cooperation programmes in the education sector also grows. To be able to control this development, to provide expertise and to ensure that matters will be carried forward as planned, it is necessary to recruit education sector advisers in the Finnish embassies. This need will be underlined particularly when small-scale projects develop into broader sector programmes. Experts will be needed as representa-

tives to ensure that there is Finnish **added value** in the form of know-how and expertise, to guarantee that Finland's 'voice' is heard, and to represent Finland in the policy dialogue conducted in the partner country.

To support the work of the Ministry and embassies, expertise will be sought from among Finnish officials and authorities in the education sector, and from among other experts.

In order to broaden the base of Finnish expertise, support will be given, resources permitting, to the training and education of experts. Because experts are needed despite the change in the modality of support, and particularly at the different stages of dialogue, there is reason to take care that the expertise that is made available is up to date. To ensure this, recruitment of junior professionals to projects and programmes, as well as to international organisations, will continue. The development of Finnish know-how and expertise provides a good resource base to draw on to meet Finland's own increased global education needs.

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### Allocations

The share of the education sector in the international development cooperation budget in recent years has been about 11-12 percent. To achieve MDGs 2 and 3, efforts have to be made to increase the relative share of basic education within the allocations for the education sector.

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