

## **Development Partners; Round Table Meeting on Education**

On December 15, 2003, the Ministry of National Development and the Ministry of Education, with support from the World Bank, convened a development partner's round table meeting on education to review the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) presented by the Government. During this meeting, the Government asked for financial and technical support for the Program, sought feedback on implementation mechanisms and constraints, and explored options for harmonization and simplification of collaboration with partners.

ESDP is conceived as a five year rolling plan to: improve access to and equality in education; enhance the quality of education; promote vocational education with emphasis in science, technology, and communication skills; and strengthen capacity. Towards that end, the Government seeks to strengthen public-private partnership, collaboration with development partners, and community participation.

Partners appreciate the Government's initiative in the education sector and recognize its commitment to education and the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) goals, including the education of girls and other under-served population groups. Partners share the Government's conviction of the education sector's strategic position in Eritrea's overall poverty reduction strategy, and acknowledge considerable efforts and achievements in the education sector to date. They welcome the inclusive approach taken and agreed, in principle, to finance and provide technical support for the ESDP.

### **Development partners:**

- ❑ Recognize Government ownership and leadership and welcome the spirit of trust and collaboration which characterized the meeting;
- ❑ Appreciate frank and constructive discussions on technical challenges;
- ❑ Are willing to support key components of the Program that are ready for implementation;
- ❑ Agree on the need for a flexible program approach and recognize that additional preparation is required for selected areas (e.g. TVET);
- ❑ Concur on the requirement to address capacity constraints, affecting service delivery and program implementation, from the level of the Ministry of Education to the school and community level;
- ❑ Welcome the Government's emphasis on establishing sector-wide monitoring and evaluation systems to facilitate efficient resource allocation and utilization;
- ❑ Stress the need for sustainability with emphasis on the Government's Medium-Term Expenditure Framework; and in this context welcome the Government's commitment to establishing a comprehensive planning and budgeting, and financial management and reporting system, which would cover both domestic and external financing;
- ❑ Emphasize the importance of harmonizing and simplifying procedures to facilitate closer collaboration and to reduce the administrative burden on Government

- ❑ Agree to provide technical assistance, share best practices as well as facilitate mentoring for education systems planning and management;
- ❑ Agree on a regular review process including all stakeholders in the sector to assess progress, identify gaps, and agree on the way forward; and
- ❑ Encourage the Government to further move toward a true sector-wide approach that would include joint financing by partners.

The meeting proposed specific arrangements and next steps in four areas:

*Technical Committee.* Establish a technical committee, including experts from Italy, Netherlands, Norway, AfDB, EC, UNICEF, DANIDA, and the World Bank, with a view to strengthening the collaboration between Government and partners and accelerating program implementation. The first technical committee meeting will be held on March 31, 2004.

*Capacity Building.* Strengthen the program management unit's (PMU) capacity to implement ESDP. Core areas include program planning and management, procurement, financial management and reporting, MIS and M&E.

*Harmonization and Simplification.* To the extent possible, harmonize and simplify procedures, including regular joint review and support missions; joint financial management and reporting and auditing mechanisms. Agreement was also reached to hold bi-annual review meeting and annual consultations to review progress.

*Comprehensive Financing Framework.* Commitments for the education sector need to be firmed up. In the context of the Medium Term Development Plan, Government will present the allocation of its contribution to the ESDP. This is considered an important element for moving towards a sector-wide approach (SWAP).