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Distribution of key school supplies starts in Zimbabwe with UN and donor support



Fifth graders at Mutasa Primary School in Harare, Zimbabwe

8 September 2010 – A major distribution of school supplies got under way today across Zimbabwe in an effort by the United Nations Children’s Fund (**UNICEF**), the Government and international donors to ensure that every primary school student receives a textbook for all core subjects.

All 5,575 primary schools in Zimbabwe will receive the supplies thanks to support from the Educational Transition Fund (ETF), a multi-donor funding mechanism launched a year ago to mobilize resources for the education sector with a view to improving the quality of schooling for the country’s children, UNICEF said in a press release.

The fund responds to numerous shortages of teaching and learning materials, textbooks and supplies in schools. Currently, around 10 pupils share every text book, while 20 per cent of primary schools, have no textbooks at all for English, mathematics or local languages.

“This week children went back to school because of this visionary partnership between the Inclusive Government, international donor community and the UN. Children will go back to school with books and learning materials for the first time in years,” said David Coltart, the country’s Minister of Education, Sports, Arts and

Culture. "It is a profound recognition that education is the foundation of Zimbabwe's recovery."

Over the past decade, Zimbabwean communities managed to keep their children and maintained high national enrolment, despite a declining economy, rising unemployment, an orphan crisis and an under-resourced education sector, which was near collapse.

The ETF is the first large-scale, external support to the education sector in the past decade and will provide learning resources to every primary school.

The distribution will see a total of 12,000 tons of school supplies, including stationery and 13 million textbooks, distributed in the next three months.

Some 20 per cent of the textbooks are being printed in Zimbabwe and the remaining in other countries in Southern Africa. A supply chain will ensure that textbooks, stationery and other school supplies from the UNICEF distribution centre are distributed to 22 hubs across the country and further transported to every school.

"The distribution exercise we launch today is undoubtedly an enormous endeavour. Yet, we relish the challenge as it is a crucial first step to restoring Zimbabwe's education system to its former glory as well as restoring the pride Zimbabweans have in educating their children," said Peter Salama, UNICEF's Representative in Zimbabwe.

The next phase of the ETF will focus on providing teacher guides and textbooks for marginalized indigenous languages approved by the education ministry, as well as Braille texts.

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