IMPROVING ACCESS TO QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION IN AFRICA

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH, AND GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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IMPROVING ACCESS TO QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Tuesday, February 8, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH, AND
GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:02 a.m., via Webex, Hon. Karen Bass [chairwoman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Ms. BASS. The Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the subcommittee at any point, and all members will have 5 days to submit statements, extraneous material, and questions for the record subject to the length limitation in the rules.

To insert something into the record, please have your staff email the previously mentioned address or contact full committee staff.

As a reminder to members, please keep your video function on at all times, even when you're not recognized by the chair. Members are responsible for muting and unmuting themselves, and please remember to mute yourself after you finish speaking.

Consistent with H. Res. 965 and the accompanying regulations, staff will only mute members and witnesses as appropriate when they are not under recognition to eliminate background noise.

I see that we have a quorum and I will now recognize myself for opening remarks.

Pursuant to notice, we are holding a hearing on improving access to quality public education in Africa to discuss the ways in which the United States can help enhance the delivery of quality education on the continent.

To lead that conversation, I want to thank our witnesses for being here today: the Honorable David Sengeh, minister of basic and senior secondary education for the Office of the President in Sierra Leone; Dr. Rebecca Winthrop, senior fellow and co-director for the Brookings Institution in the Center for Universal Education; Ms. Yasmine Sherif, director of Education Cannot Wait; and Mr. Robert Kaufman, executive director of the Abaarso Network.

I welcome your testimony and the discussion surrounding it. I look forward to hearing from our experts to describe the ways in which the U.S. can strengthen basic education systems in Africa and what we can do to increase access to quality schooling be it public or private.

Across the continent to varying degrees the pre-primary, primary, middle, and secondary education system, what we in the

United States would generally refer to as pre-K to 12, or basic education, requires support.

The African Union's Continental Strategy for Africa from 2016 to 2025 reports progress in expanding access to primary education across Africa from 59 to 79 percent between 1999 and 2012.

However, these gains could be increased should there be greater policy emphasis and investment in target areas such as pre-primary education, educating girls and children with disabilities, increasing funding for infrastructure and educators.

These types of strategies are important and must be specific to local context. But the fundamental goal remains the same—get all children to school early, develop solutions to coherently link the stages of basic education to ensure they acquire a strong foundation without interruption.

It is disheartening to hear that by the time children reach primary school age an estimated 34 million of them go unenrolled. The trend continues and is even greater for middle and secondary school-aged children, respectively.

The COVID–19 pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges through the closure of schools, pushing hundreds of millions of students out of school since the beginning of the pandemic.

I feel it is important for us to do more to create policy and investment opportunities on the continent to improve access to education.

This Congress, I plan on introducing a bill that focuses on promoting access to inclusive, uninterrupted quality pre-primary and secondary education in Africa, reauthorizing the Reinforcing Education Accountability Act, also known as the READ Act.

I want to prioritize the importance of education at a young age that goes uninterrupted because these children will grow to contribute to the expanding and growing economies on the continent, which will in turn strengthen the continent's capacity for self-reliance.

In recent discussions with USAID education experts, I learned that under the auspices of the READ Act the United States seeks to work within local contexts to improve quality and expand access to education across the continent.

Beyond its traditional engagement, USAID is expanding outreach to include nongovernmental education providers through new financing approaches. Again, the goal is to improve the quality of education and to reach more children as early as possible and have them finish basic levels.

These fresh ideas are needed and must be realized to meet the mutually beneficial goals of the U.S. and Africa. Further, it must be a priority for U.S. national security interests to educate on the importance of democratic principles and free market economies.

Hopefully, young people will be taught about democracy, the rule of law, free speech, freedom of the press and assembly, and have the hope of real prospects of employment that these ideals provide and protect.

Finally, children who have access to quality education go on to partake in opportunities for young professionals through programs such as the Young African Leaders Initiative, which includes the Mandela Washington Fellowship that I introduced and passed in

the House—the YALI Act—to strengthen young leaders' knowledge and skills

[inaudible].

I now recognize the ranking member for the purpose of making his opening Statement.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, and I want to thank my good friend and colleague, Chairwoman Karen Bass, for convening today's very important hearing on improving access to quality public education in Africa.

I know that this is a topic that she is passionate about, and over the years, she has repeatedly shown her deep concern for Africa's youth, who are, indeed, Africa's future.

This has been shown by her efforts while here in Congress as, first, ranking member and then chair of the Africa Subcommittee to solidify and strengthen the Young African Leaders Initiative, or YALI.

It is also demonstrated by her convening today's hearing on improving access to quality public education.

I think one of the concerns, which we have shared over the years, is the compelling need for the State sector throughout Africa to provide for the people, be it in the area of health, education, or simply protection and good governance.

That's why reviewing successes and what works is important. We also need to realize that in many countries, a robust public education system is, at this point, aspirational and that has to change.

Indeed, if you go to a place such as the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, which is very remote from the capital of Kinsasha—and I know I've been there twice—we see a minimal State presence in education as well as in healthcare.

Thus, there is a role for the private education as well, and, in particular, faith-based schools. This is especially true in Africa, which, as a witness at one of our hearings a few years ago put it, is a faith-based continent.

Indeed, there's probably no institution more active at the grassroots level of communities throughout Sub-Saharan Africa than the churches and variously affiliated schools, be they Christian or Muslim, and in all education efforts, we need to place the interests of children, their parents, and families, as paramount.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights envisions a system of free education, quote, "directed to the full development of the human personality, and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms."

Wisely, the Universal Declaration also proclaims that, quote, "Parents shall have a prior right to choose the kind of education that should be given to their children," closed quote.

With these words from the great inspirational and aspirational document, I look forward to this hearing, and again, I thank my good friend for convening it.

And I yield back.

Ms. BASS. Thank you very much. I appreciate your comments.

I would now like to introduce our witnesses for today's hearing.

First, we have the Honorable David Sengeh. He's the Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and the Chief Innovation Officer for the government of Sierra Leone. He also serves as the

chair of the advisory board of UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report, board member of the Global Partnership for Education, and a member of the High Level Steering Committee for Sustainable Development Goal Number Four, which is a quality education.

Next, we have Dr. Rebecca Winthrop. She is a senior fellow and co-director of the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution.

Her research focuses on education globally, with special attention to the skills young people need to thrive in work, life, and as constructive citizens. She was educated at Columbia University Teachers College, Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, and Swarthmore College.

Our third witness is Ms. Yasmine Sherif. She is the Director of Education Cannot Wait, a global fund for education emergencies and protracted crisis as established by the World Humanitarian Summit.

A lawyer specialized in international humanitarian law and human rights law, she has 30 years of experience with the U.N. and international NGO's. She has served in some of the most crisis-affected countries on the globe.

I would now like—oh, I'm sorry.

And our final witness is Mr. Robert Kaufman. Mr. Kaufman has been a co-founder, director, and senior representative for humanitarian and education institutions for two decades.

He began his career as a grant-funded researcher in West Africa working for Save the Children and the American Red Cross in various positions on four continents.

We appreciate all of you being here today and look forward to your testimony. Your written statements will appear in the hearing record, and under Committee Rule No. 6, each witness should limit your oral presentation to a 5-minute summary of your written Statement, and I believe there will be a clock that you will see on the screen when your 5 minutes is up.

And with that, I would like to welcome our first guests again—our first witness, Dr. David Sengeh.

STATEMENT OF DAVID SENGEH, MINISTER OF BASIC AND SENIOR SECONDARY EDUCATION, OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT, SIERRA LEONE

Mr. SENGEH. Chair Bass, Ranking Member Smith, and other distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to this important hearing on improving access to quality public education in Africa.

While I must admit it is a tough task to speak on behalf of the entire African continent, I do also believe that investments in quality public education is the closest thing we have to a silver bullet that solves the world's intractable problems.

If we achieve this, we will lay the foundation for gender equality, climate action, social inclusion, and economic growth.

In Sierra Leone, upon assuming office in 2018, His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio announced the free quality school education program for all children in public schools.

Three years in, we have simultaneously improved access, quality, and gender equity, and all this is against the backdrop of COVID related school closures.

On access, between 2018 and 2020, we added more than 700,00 new learners to our schools. We have achieved while attending gender parity and enrollments at nearly all levels.

We have more girls than boys in primary and secondary schools, and we're actively working to improve transition of girls into senior secondary and tertiary at higher institutions.

On quality, we now have more students succeeding in passing the National Transition exams than at any point in our country's history. For junior secondary school, we were able to improve the pass rates from 72 percent to 79 percent in 3 years, while adding more than 40,000 students to the examination roster.

Although hard, we're seeing that this is possible to achieve quality while expanding access. We have also made significant headway on our early grade reading and math assessments known as EGRA and EGMA.

I'm proud to say that across nearly all reading and math tasks, we have cut the percentage of students who score zero in half since the last assessments in 2014.

How did Sierra Leone get there? In a word, we invested. We pay the full bill for school fees in public schools and pay the examination fees for nearly all students.

Moreover, we have hired more than 12,000 teachers, increased all teacher salaries by 30 percent, and doubled down on continuous professional development.

In addition, we invested in new teaching and learning materials and school feeding programs. We believe that children must have access to nutritious meals for learning and their holistic development.

We have created a new set of curricula relevant for the 21st century at all school levels.

Furthermore, we innovated. For example, we introduced digital SMS-based learning tools including a free SMS dictionary where students can now check their exam results and school placements with their mobile phones instead of waiting for the paper results to travel to their schools. Our digital tools have been used millions of times.

Just recently, we introduced the Learning Passport, which gives students access to past exam papers. On the first day, it was downloaded 4,000 times.

We also launched the Education Innovation Challenge where service providers support primary schools to generate evidence on how learning can even further improve. This year we'll scale the concept to cover more than 100,000 children.

Our goal is clear. We should have impacts and learn through the process of achieving that. We have laid the policy groundwork for education to improve on all fronts.

Our radical inclusion policy ensures the inclusion of girls, especially pregnant ones, disabled learners, learners from remote areas, and learners from impoverished backgrounds in our educational system.

We have already overturned the 2010 ban on pregnant girls attending school, and we're only getting started. This year, we'll update the Education Act of 2004 to match our aspirations.

Also, we're spending 22 percent of our national budget on education. We have made hard choices to protect this budget, but we are confident that Sierra Leone will reap the rewards for decades to come.

In the year of COVID–19, Sierra Leone is one of the few countries who have expanded its education budget. This has been a journey, but we are very far from finished. So how can the United States help accelerate progress?

I serve as board member on GPE and I believe that it is the best vehicle for pooling international efforts to accelerate progress toward our common educational goals.

The U.S. has supported the GPE generously over the years. But if the distinguished members will forgive me for the observation, these contributions are surpassed by accumulated contributions from countries such as Denmark, whose populations are smaller than the State of Maryland.

In short, the GPE is the best place to start, and I believe the United States can do more.

On the personal note, I studied in the United States for 10 years. I know that when the United States supports bold goals alongside the international community there is nothing that can stop us.

To underscore my point, I think I need only mentioned PEPFAR to recall the United States' massive investment in saving millions of lives and helping African countries control the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

This kind of investment is now needed in quality public education. Sierra Leone will be honored to continue our partnership with you on the journey to improving access to quality public education.

Together, nothing can stop us. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sengeh follows:]

Testimony of David Moinina Sengeh, Ph.D.
Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education & Chief Innovation Officer
Government of Sierra Leone

Hearing on "Improving Access to Quality Public Education in Africa "
U.S. House of Representatives
House Foreign Affairs Committee
The House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights.

Date 8 February 2022

Chair Bass, Ranking Member Smith and other distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify at this hearing on "Improving Access to Quality Public Education in Africa". While I must admit it is always a tough task speaking on behalf of the entire African continent, I do truly believe that the single most important investment any government can make to transform our society is an investment in "Public Education." And Quality Public Education is the closest thing we have towards a universal silver bullet for solving our planets most intractable challenges now and in the future.

The question you have asked to consider at today's hearing is how the United States in particular can help facilitate the accessibility of quality pre-primary, primary and secondary education in African countries with moderate to low human development indices and incomes.

A recent report by UNESCO's Institute for Statistics and the Global Education Monitoring Report shows that while the world has come a long way since the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in 2015; countries, by their own estimates, will fail to meet critical agreed-on targets for a universally inclusive and equitable quality education, unless of course, we all commit to transforming education, now.

In Sierra Leone, we have made some accelerated progress on that front since H.E President Julius Maada Bio announced a "Free Quality School Education" policy for all children in public schools in 2018. More than 700,000 leaners have joined our education system in the last three years, bringing the total to 2.7 million enrolled children. What's more, in 2021, more students passed the national transition exams in basic and senior secondary education than at any point in our country's history. And this is all against the backdrop of a global pandemic that forced over 1.6 billion children including yours and ours out of school for significant periods of time between 2020 and 2021.

Today, I would first like to share my view on how we are doing in Sierra Leone, and then to invite the United States to help us and the world accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

On Ranking Low on Human Development Indices and Incomes – For Now

Firstly, my country – Sierra Leone – certainly falls into the category of scoring low on human development indices. In the 2020 edition of the World Bank's Human Capital Index, we came in as number 165. Only 8 eight countries ranked below us. Countries currently ravaged by war and famine are outperforming us. For Sierra Leone, education scores were among our worst performing indicators. I am mentioning this just to note that while we certainly do fall in the category of low human development, we are working very hard to change that. Just last week, we published new

data on the Early Grade Reading Assessment and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment – two indices used for calculating the Human Capital Index and the results show significant improvement since the last study, which was done in 2014.

Expanding Access to Education – Adding 10% of the Population To The School System While Improving Gender Parity

Between 2018 and 2020, we added more than 700,000 new learners to our pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. Data from our Annual School Census show growth in enrollment in pre-Primary education, Primary education (six years of education), Junior Secondary School (three years) and Senior Secondary School (three years).

Total Enrollment has increased by 36% 2018-20, equivalent to 700,000+ more students

Total Enrollment in Basic and Secondary Education

Percentage Increase

			Total	36%
	2,654,306	2,695,230		
	305,085	327,499	SSS	59%
1,982,475	451,685	467,585	JSS	48%
206,536				
315,500				
	1,770,368	1,759,775	Primary	28%
1,369,738				
90,701	127,168	140,371	Pre-primary	55%
2018	2019	2020		

+712,755

Source: Annual School Census
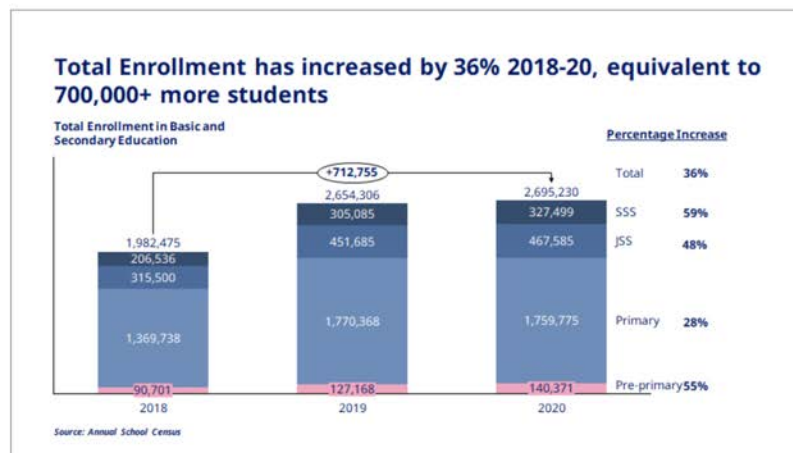
We have achieved this while accelerating towards overall gender parity in enrollment. In fact, at all levels except for Senior Secondary School, more girls than boys enroll, and even in Senior Secondary School the trend is encouraging as we are moving ever closer to parity.

Enrollment Gender Equity: Clear improvement in parity for SSS; overall parity close to 1.00
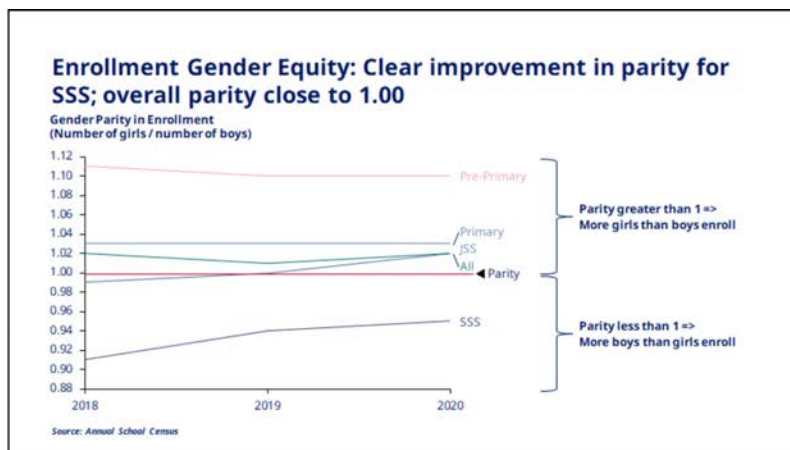
Ensuring That Access and Quality Go Hand In Hand

Globally, the world has made great strides in expanding access to education in recent decades. However, learning has too often lagged behind. If we ensure that access and improved learning go hand in hand, it can have an enormously beneficial impact. A research study from 2021 found that if you look at learning and not just access, the gains from education for girls are 3 times higher than from access alone.[1] And access was already a very good start, but we need to improve quality across the board.

In Sierra Leone, we track learning in two principal ways: national transition exams, and specific assessments following an international format like the Early Grade Reading Assessment and Early Grade Mathematics Assessments (EGRA / EGMA) for primary education.

Firstly, we now have more students sitting and passing the national transition exam after Primary School (National Primary School Exam, NPSE) and Junior Secondary School (Basic Education Certificate Examination, BECE) than at any point in our country's history. For Junior Secondary School we were even able to improve the pass rate from 72% to 79% while adding more than 40,000 students to the examination roster in 2021.

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[1] Kaffenberger, M. and Pritchett, L. 2021. Effective Investment in Women's Futures: Schooling with Learning.*International Journal of Educational Development.*Volume 86, 102464,
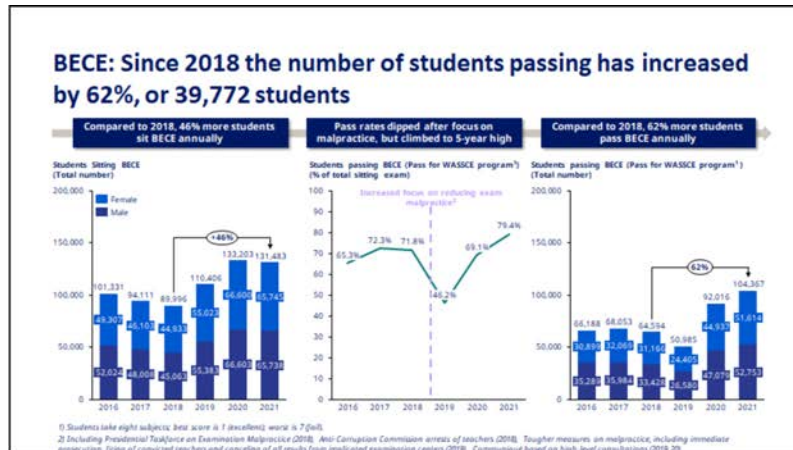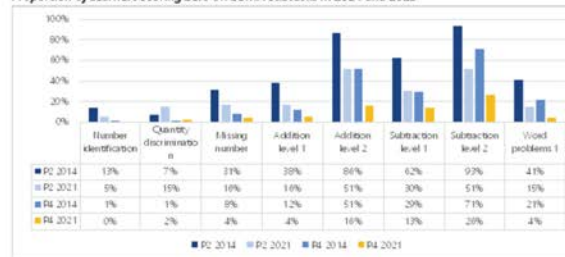
Secondly, we have made significant strides on our EGRA/EGMA results. One way to compare performance over time is to look at zero scores – the percentage of students who score zero on a given reading or mathematics task. I am proud to say that across nearly all tasks, we have cut the percentage of zero scores in half or better in seven years. Our learners are now getting the building blocks that will allow them to benefit from the entire educational system and Sierra Leone is faring better in comparison to other countries in our economic bracket. This is no coincidence as we for the first time added a minimum of one year pre-primary education to our school system in 2018.
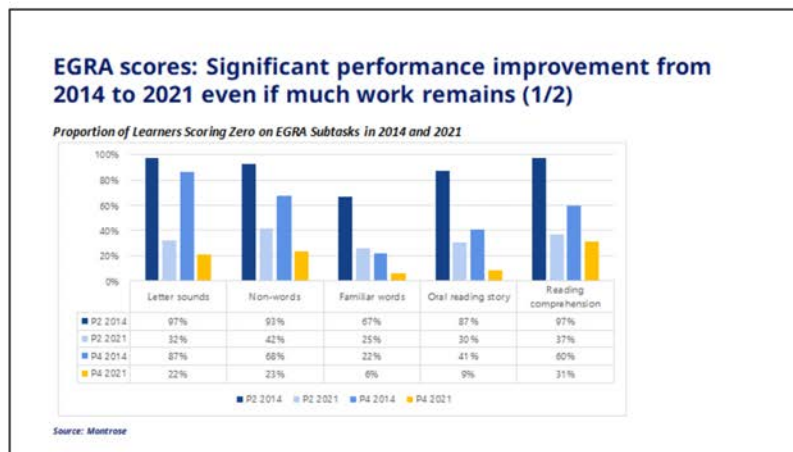
EGMA scores: Significant performance improvement from 2014 even if much work remains (2/2)

Proportion of Learners Scoring Zero on EGMA Subtasks in 2014 and 2021

	Number identification	Quantity discrimination	Missing number	Addition level 1	Addition level 2	Subtraction level 1	Subtraction level 2	Word problem 1
P2 2014	13%	7%	31%	38%	84%	62%	92%	41%
P2 2021	5%	15%	10%	16%	51%	30%	51%	15%
P4 2014	1%	1%	9%	12%	51%	29%	71%	21%
P4 2021	0%	2%	4%	4%	16%	13%	28%	4%

P2 2014   P2 2021   P4 2014   P4 2021

Source: Montrose

How Sierra Leone Got There

You may ask yourselves, well, how is it that Sierra Leone is progressing like this? In a word, "investment"- we are investing heavily in public education. The current government led by the Sierra Leone's People Party (SLPP) won the 2018 election on a platform of Free Quality School Education for all. His Excellency the President, Dr. Julius Maada Bio's agenda promise was implemented in government and government-assisted schools through the abolition of school fees and the abolition of examination fees for all students including those in private schools. In addition, we invested in new teaching and learning materials and school feeding programs. Moreover, we have hired thousands of additional teachers and increased their salaries by 30%. The President has instituted the Presidential Best Teacher Awards to recognize and celebrate the contributions of teachers to our society and doubled down on professional development. We have a new set of curricula relevant for the 21st century at all school levels.

This is not "free" of course. We are spending 22% of our national budget on education, making human capital development the core focus of the Sierra Leonean government's agenda. We have been forced to make some hard choices to protect the education budget, but we are confident that our country will reap the rewards for decades to come. In fact, Sierra Leone is one of only a few countries to expand our education budget in the year of COVID-19.

In addition, we have clamped down on examination malpractice. In 2018, Sierra Leone launched the Presidential Taskforce on Examination Malpractice and in 2019 we adopted new, tougher measures on malpractice, including immediate prosecution, firing of convicted teachers and canceling of all results from implicated examination centers. The national Anti-Corruption Act was updated to include education malpractice as a corruption offence.

Furthermore, we innovated, especially during the COVID-19-related school closures. We used radio teaching to continue classes, and we invested in stronger radio transmitters and solar-powered radios to ensure coverage in farthest reaches of our country.

We introduced digital, sms-based learning tools, including a free SMS dictionary and word-of-the-day service. After the final NPSE and BECE exams, students could check their results and school placement on their phones instead of waiting for the paper results to travel to their school- a process that took up to 10 weeks and cost poor families up to $10 before. Our digital tools have been used millions of times. Just recently, we introduced the Learning Passport in partnership with UNICEF that gives students access to all past papers in a browser and an app (online and offline). Thousands of users registered immediately. This spring, we will pilot the one-tablet-per-school program to generate more frequent data on student and teacher attendance and introduce digital teaching tools.

Within our Government Incubation Hub in the Office of the President, we launched the Education Innovation Challenge where service providers support primary schools with interventions across the country to generate evidence on how learning can be even further improved in Sierra Leone. The results have been promising and we will scale that to cover even more schools in partnership with the Education Outcomes Fund from September 2022. This approach links investments to impact and outcomes.

Moreover, we are now laying the policy groundwork for education to improve on all fronts in the years to come. We have introduced policies on Radical Inclusion which promote equity; Integrated Homegrown School Feeding which ties in health, agriculture and education; Integrated Early Childhood Development which deals with the holistic preparedness and welfare of the child; Comprehensive Sexuality Education and more. By Radical Inclusion, we will specifically ensure the inclusion of girls, especially pregnant ones, disabled learners, learners from remote areas and from impoverished backgrounds. We have already overturned the 2010 ban on pregnant girls attending school, and we are only getting started. For to us to achieve inclusive education meaningfully, I personally believe that all children must learn the basics of braille and sign language in addition to the English alphabets and numbers

When I speak to my colleagues from countries that have grown consistently over the past half-century, such as China and Rwanda, they tell me that they have been investing heavily in public education throughout. We are three years in and can already show results, but we also want to underscore that this is only the beginning.

Internationally, I serve as the chair of the Advisory Board of UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report, as an Executive Committee board member of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and member of the High-Level Steering Committee for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education, which is the highest body in the UN related to SDG 4. I avail myself of these fora to share our story of transformation, learn from others and to urge that the world invests in enabling similar improvement everywhere. We are aware that we still have a lot to do with poor infrastructure, large class sizes, poor metrics with regards Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene in schools but we are confident in the agenda to #TransformEducation in Sierra Leone.

What Is Needed – How the United States Can Accelerate Progress

In Sierra Leone, we are fortunate to work with a set of development partners who are committed to supporting our journey to advance education. We are working closely with the United Kingdom's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, the European Union Commission, The Republic of Ireland's Irish Aid program, UNICEF and the World Bank, to name but a few of the major partners, on crucial projects across the sector. In addition, we work closely with a number of international and local NGOs. This has given us important lessons on the type of support that accelerates progress the most.

Indeed, Sierra Leone's education sector is already benefitting from American support through multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and GPE. In addition, we receive generous support from the McGovern-Dole International Fund for Education and Child Nutrition Program for Catholic Relief Services' school feeding programs, as well as American support for other education NGOs.

As mentioned, I serve as board member of the GPE, and I believe that this is the best place for pooling international efforts to accelerate progress toward our common education goals. The GPE represents a wealth of expertise and an approach to supporting education sectors that is constantly being improved through feedback from the member countries. The United States has supported GPE generously over the years, but, if the distinguished members of the committee will forgive me for the observation, their contributions are surpassed by cumulative contributions from countries such as Denmark and Norway, whose populations are smaller than the state of Maryland.

I believe the United States can do more.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation which Sierra Leone is now eligible to develop a Compact for also is a vehicle for supporting largescale development in our countries. While most of the investments are not in education, the fact that education metrics remain on the scorecard is an excellent motivation for countries. Sierra Leone looks forward to completing and executing its Compact Development process.

In the Ministry of Education, we have been fortunate to benefit from a set of embedded advisors who are working shoulder to shoulder with our own education experts. The advisors represent institutions such as the Education Partnerships Group, the EdTech Hub, the Overseas Development Institute, Oxford Policy Management and the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. They build trust-based relationships that directly support our work, and I can only encourage this approach to joint problem solving. We also work closely with researchers and academics from institutions in the United States including Harvard, Yale and MIT. We believe that the US Government should support these exchanges between academic institutions in the United States and those in Africa.

I studied in the United States for close to ten years, and I know that when you support bold goals alongside the international community, there is nothing that can stop us. I think I need only mention the PEPFAR acronym to recall the United States' massive investment in saving millions of lives and helping countries control HIV/AIDS epidemic to underscore my point. This kind of investment and commitment is needed in Public Education.

Finally, Sierra Leone sits on the board of the UN Digital Public Goods Alliance. We work to accelerate progress toward the SDGs by facilitating the discovery, development, use of, and investment in digital public goods. As an international technology leader, the United States is an obvious fit. We

encourage your support and leadership in this area of ensuring universal access to connectivity to all schools.

Sierra Leone would be honored to continue to partner with you on the journey to improving access to quality public education around the world in in particular, in Africa. Together, nothing can stop us.

Ms. BASS. Thank you. Thank you very much.
Dr. Rebecca Winthrop?

STATEMENT OF DR. REBECCA WINTHROP, SENIOR FELLOW AND CO-DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR UNIVERSAL EDUCATION, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

Dr. WINTHROP. Hello. Thank you very much for having me, Representative Bass, Representative Omar, Representative Smith, and the distinguished members of the committee. It's a pleasure to be here.

I am sharing my perspectives from my personal experience, both as a practitioner on the continent for some years and also in our current work at the Center for Universal Education.

We work with about 35 African partners across 21 countries, including a host of about 12 fellows on girls education. We have a girls education fellowship every year who, who are based in Sub-Saharan Africa.

I am really, really thrilled that you're focused on this. It is such an important issue for all the reasons you said but, you know, it's important for Africa but it's important for the whole globe.

Africa is the youngest continent in the world. Sixty percent of the population is below the age of 25, and by 2050, it'll be home to about 70 percent of the world's working age population. It is, literally, going to be the global talent pool for everybody, and so we really do need to put education at the center.

In terms of what the United States can do, in 2010, I wrote a piece when I came to Brookings initially called "Punching Below its Weight: The U.S. Government's Approach to Education in the Developing World," and the reason I came to that assessment was because I found that there were 13 different agencies working on education and development with very little coordination and synergy, and the sum of the parts, you know, did not make for a greater impact.

I am really pleased that this is beginning to change. With the U.S. Government strategy on international and basic education, which came to being in 2019 and is coming up in 2023, this is really the first time this whole of government approach has been taken.

I urge the committee to make sure this is renewed. We're seeing the benefits already. And I would put forward the recommendation to renew this with four main additional focus areas. I have four recommendations.

The first one is, really, around harnessing the innovative capacity of African communities. One of the things that I note and a lot of our partners talk about is that anytime you get in a discourse about foreign aid or international development there's lots of problems, which there are, but it really obscures all the innovation and creativity and ingenuity on the ground that African communities are using to solve their problems every day.

I've done a global study of education innovation around the world and found a very robust education innovation sector on the continent. And I would—we hear a lot from our partners about U.S. Government strategies funding that.

So, bilaterally, I would continue the small steps that the basic education strategy has started of funding more local partners and really flip it—really put African innovators and actors at the center and bring the international community into support them rather than the other way round.

And second, I agree wholeheartedly with Minister Sengeh. Increasing, multilaterally, support for GPE would be very important.

The entire approach puts African governments at the center and, at the moment, the U.S. gives about $125 million, which is—annually, which is a far cry from the $1.5 billion annually it gets to the Global Fund for Health. So that's recommendation one.

Recommendation two is to keep focusing on enriched teaching and learning experiences around foundational literacy and numeracy. This is an area the U.S. Government has really led on. It is no time to take your eye off the prize.

Eighteen percent of children and youth—only 18 percent master basic foundational literacy and numeracy. And in stable, you know, contexts, working to train teachers on differentiated instruction and more interactive pedagogies and scaling that approach that has shown to be effective is great.

The U.S. Government should do more, though, to think about flexible approaches like catch-up classes and tablet-based learning that have been shown to work without having a consistent teacher for all the kids, whether it be COVID or conflict or climate impacts, that aren't able to readily access stable education and learning.

Additionally, family engagement and really supporting communities to support their kids learning has shown to be highly cost effective, and I would encourage the U.S. Government to invest more there.

My third recommendation is around investing in models of learning to prepare youth for the work force. There are estimates that there's about $175 billion needed in Sub-Saharan Africa to educate all kids in secondary education but only $25 billion currently is being invested.

This is a big area wide open. There's not one massive global—you know, sort of global bilateral leading on it. The U.S. could really harness its whole of government approach and bring in the public-private partnerships that are needed to actually revolutionize what secondary education looks like on the continent.

There's huge demands from people like Minister Sengeh and others with very large youth populations that have only been exacerbated by COVID, and the U.S. Government could play a lead role.

Ms. BASS. Thank you, Dr. Winthrop.

Dr. WINTHROP. My fourth and last recommendation is really around leading on system transformation for climate change. This is an area that we are just in the education sector beginning to grapple with. Only 25 percent of countries around the world even mention children's youth education in their national climate plans.

Ms. BASS. Excuse me. Let me interrupt.

Dr. WINTHROP. Yes?

Ms. BASS. Your time is up but you will get additional time in Q&A.

Dr. WINTHROP. OK. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Winthrop follows:]

Testimony of Rebecca Winthrop, Ph.D.
Senior Fellow and Co-Director
Center for Universal Education
The Brookings Institution

Hearing on "Access to Quality Education in Africa"
U.S. House of Representatives
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights

February 8, 2022

Chairwoman Bass, Vice Chairwoman Omar, Ranking Member Smith, and other distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today on the importance of and path forward for helping all of Africa's children and youth get the 21st century education they deserve. This topic is one that I am deeply committed to advancing however I can, and today I will share my insights both as a former practitioner working on education initiatives across sub-Saharan Africa and as a current scholar at the Brookings Institution working on global education issues. My colleague, Emiliana Vegas, and I co-direct the Center for Universal Education at Brookings where our team currently focuses on addressing education inequality in countries around the world, including through working closely with 35 African partners from national governments to nonprofit organizations across 21 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Our work is also heavily informed by our team of Echidna Global Scholars who are girls' education leaders around the globe, including 12 scholars leading work on gender equality in education in six countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

As the committee is already well aware, ensuring *all* Africa's children and youth have high-quality education opportunities that prepare them for the 21st century world we live in is not only the right thing to do—children everywhere have a right to a quality education —but is also the smart thing to. It falls squarely within four overarching buckets central to the U.S. government's (USG) strategic interests.

- *Economic.* The growth in the world's labor market is in Africa. As other parts of the world begin to age, Africa will grow its population and today's children will be the talent tomorrow's global companies will be recruiting. In the next 30 years, it is projected that sub-Saharan Africa's working-age population will increase more than twofold— accounting for 68% of the world's total growth. Economists have shown that controlling for other factors, increasing girls' and boys' years of schooling (and the skills they learn while there) has a positive effect on economic growth. Ensuring girls' secondary education is particularly impactful. Providing high-quality education today will help build the skills for the world's future workforce, increase incomes, grow economies, and expand U.S. markets and trading partners.

- **Security.** Providing education equitably across a country's population can reduce the risk of violent conflict. Especially in countries with large youth populations, equitable education provision can support political stability by sending the signal that the government is attending to people's needs and giving people more tools to resolve disputes peacefully. This "pacifying effect" of education, as conflict researchers often refer to it, can help reduce the risk of civil war and the growth of ungovernable territories and safe havens for violent extremism. Ultimately, it helps promote the safety and security of the U.S.

- **Global health.** Educated girls and women can better seek and negotiate life-saving health care for themselves and their children. Global studies have shown increased education—particularly for girls—leads to less infant deaths, less maternal mortality, and less infection from viruses (HIV/AIDs). The evidence is so strong for girls' education that some health researchers call it a "social vaccine." Healthier communities mean less strains on health systems, a particularly timely interest of the U.S. given the global COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Climate change.** Increased levels of education support communities' resilience in the face of climate change and can help reduce communities' carbon footprints by leading to smaller, more sustainable families. Educating and empowering women can decrease death rates and displacement due to weather-related disasters, and could result in an estimated 85 gigaton reduction of carbon dioxide by 2050, which is not only in the U.S.'s interest but the world's.

Given the importance of educating Africa's children and youth, I would urge the committee to bolster USG attention, funding, and support to increase access to quality education. I offer the below four recommendations for the committee to consider as possible ways to do this.

Recommendation 1: Harness the innovative capacity of African communities

Across the continent, African communities are innovating to solve their problems, often with very little resources. With limited access to physical banks, in Kenya a cellphone company started a global revolution in personal finance (and financial inclusion) in 2007 by inventing mobile money. This idea of "a bank in your pocket" accessed through personal cell phones has spread rapidly across the world. In 2021, Nollywood—Africa's Hollywood—was the second most prolific film industry in the world. Started less than two decades ago by Kenneth Nnebue with frugal, straight to VHS films, Africa's film industry is now giving America's century-old film industry a run for its money. In South Africa, farmers are optimizing their agriculture practices with the help of a platform that combines satellite, drone, and artificial intelligence technology. Today's innovators are standing on the shoulders of a long line of cutting-edge creatives as Africa's history demonstrates.

All too often in the U.S., the dire news headlines about Africa obscure the ingenuity and innovative capacity of African communities. Focusing solely on the great needs of communities,

without simultaneously recognizing their tremendous assets to solve problems, can create a hard-to-see but nonetheless dangerous mindset that Africans cannot be true partners in the identification and design of solutions to problems the USG is interested in addressing.

The U.S. Government Strategy on International and Basic Education established in 2019 provides a welcome shift in focusing on partnerships and local ownership. This is one important part of the strategy that should be continued and strengthened. For example, USAID funding has traditionally gone mainly to U.S.-based organizations that have deep technical expertise, excellent administrative capabilities, and sophisticated know-how on navigating USG procurement processes. Often these U.S. organizations will sub-grant to local nonprofits, universities, or networks once a grant is awarded to help implement a specific set of activities. Recently however, especially with the guidance of the Government Strategy on International and Basic Education, USAID is awarding more grants directly to local organizations, beginning to involve local organizations in discussions about the design of programs, and—in a handful of cases—the usual relationship between U.S. and local organizations has been flipped (the local organization is the lead or "prime" and the U.S. organization is its subgrantee).

This increased participation of local actors is not only important to enhance local "ownership" and "sustainability" of USG -funded projects, which is the main rationale in the strategy, but also to harness the creative ideas local organizations and communities can bring to solving some of their most pressing problems. At the Center for Universal Education at Brookings, one of my areas of focus has been on bottom-up innovation and examining the potential it has to help accelerate, or leapfrog, the pace at which education is improving. Having conducted a review of over 3,000 education innovations across 160 countries in my study—*Leapfrogging Inequality: Remaking Education to Help Young People Thrive*—we found a dynamic innovation sector in every corner of the globe. Of the countries with the most innovations, one in four were in Africa. Many innovations have the potential to radically bend the curve and close the "100-year-gap," which is what we estimated prior to COVID-19 was the time it will take given the current pace of change for the most marginalized African children to catch up in terms of education outcomes with their more enfranchised peers. However, most innovations occurred on the margins of education systems and are hampered by limited attention, funding, and organizational support.

Across its education work in Africa, the USG policy directives, agency strategies and operations would do well to not only tap into this innovative capacity within African communities but understand and support the conditions that would help unleash its potential. This is both a mindset and an implementation approach that should be embraced across whatever thematic priorities the USG is investing in. Below are two specific examples of actions the USG could take to support this direction:

- **Bilateral.** In its ongoing bilateral support for education in Africa, the USG should continue the work of increasingly co-designing and directly supporting local organizations. The many U.S.-based organizations working on education in Africa have many talented and thoughtful team members who should be tapped for their expertise,

but they should not be the only ones at the table helping design USG programs nor the only ones leading implementation. As a neutral convenor of global education policy debates, we frequently get requests from our African partners, including government officials, to help brainstorm ideas on how to tackle a particular problem "free from the difficulties of managing the priorities of multiple donors" as one partner put it. One concrete way for the USG to advance this is to invest in a design thinking process with African partners at the center and multiple actors from across a range of disciplines assisting in brainstorming how to "leapfrog" or rapidly accelerate progress in addressing a particular problem (e.g. low literacy levels, high youth unemployment). Systematically supporting "leapfrog labs", a virtual space to conduct this process, could be one way to deepen USG's work in this area.

- **Multilateral.** The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is the largest global fund dedicated to improving education primarily in low-income countries. With work in over 40 African partner countries, the USG could increase its support to GPE which puts country voices at the center of its model by supporting ministries of education to develop strong policies building on inclusive consultation with local and international organizations. Ministers of Education in Africa and countries around the world have called on GPE to "shift from business as usual" and are keenly interested in strategies that can accelerate the pace of change and ensure "our collective efforts transform the teaching and learning experience." Supporting this call to action through increased funding to GPE is another concrete way to move this work forward. Currently, the USG gives $125 million annually to GPE, a far cry from the over $1.5 billion annual contribution the USG gives to the global fund for health.

Recommendation 2: Support enriched teaching and learning experiences to improve foundational literacy and numeracy

Africa's young children are failing to master basic literacy and numeracy skills, which is crucial if they hope to have any longevity in their educational journeys. It is very difficult to explore and master the diverse curricular subjects from history to science that tare required as children progress through school without strong reading abilities and foundational understanding of mathematics. According to UNESCO's recent Global Education Monitoring Report, only 18% of all primary-school age children in sub-Saharan Africa achieve minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics, many of whom are enrolled in school. The World Bank and UNESCO Institute of Statistics are tracking this crisis through their work on "learning poverty" which is defined as those children in school who cannot read by age 10 together with those children out of school whom they assume cannot read. They argue that if children do not master reading by age 10, they are unlikely to do so later in life.

The USG has over the last decade invested heavily in addressing this "learning crisis", including in developing internal staff capacity and international partner collaboration. The needs in this area are so great that the USG should continue to support partners to address foundational literacy and numeracy. A mix of approaches will be needed to address this challenge given that

approaches for stable contexts will not be the same needed for situations of instability. With the COVID-19 pandemic, rising levels of conflict, and increasing climate related disasters, a nimble approach to adapting strategies should be fostered across all USG agencies working on education.

In contexts where children are regularly attending school, the focus should be on the classroom-based teaching and learning strategies that have been shown to be effective and able to scale. For example, one cost-effective approach is Teaching at the Right Level which uses differentiated instruction (grouping students by level rather than grade) and interactive pedagogical methods to improve student learning outcomes. Pioneered in India by the non-profit Pratham, this has also been shown to be effective in Africa. One rigorous study in Kenya demonstrated that dividing classrooms into groups based on students' learning level increased test scores for all students.

There are many children however who need different approaches largely because they are not able to access stable schooling provision either because they are out of school or live in contexts of conflict, instability, which is a situation only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, only two of three children in sub-Saharan Africa who enter primary school complete it. UNICEF estimates that in the region nearly 250 million children were affected by pandemic related school closures, on top of the approximately 100 million children out of school before the pandemic, approximately 40 million of whom are of primary-school age. Additionally, 14 African countries are on the World Bank's most recent list of fragile and conflict affected situations as experiencing at least medium intensity conflict.

In these contexts, it is important to consider flexible approaches to improving foundational literacy and numeracy. One approach is to use accelerated learning programs that help children who have missed several years of schooling catch-up and re-enter school. One example of this type of program is the Luminos Fund's Second Chance program focused on out-of-school children ages 8-14 in Ethiopia and Liberia. Young adults from the students' communities are recruited and trained to lead a program where students learning literacy and numeracy through interactive, activity-based approaches. The program covers the first three years of school in 10-months after which time students enter primary school. A longitudinal evaluation found that that this form of "catch-up" learning is far from being a handicap for students but rather an asset. Students in the Second Chance program complete primary school at a rate that is nearly double that of government students, they outperform their peers in English and Math, are happier and more confident, and have higher aspiration to continue their education beyond the primary years.

Some flexible learning approaches also have the potential to support children's literacy and numeracy learning in diverse situations from in and to out of school. The teacher shortage in sub-Saharan Africa is acute with an estimated 15 million more teachers needed. Unwieldly class sizes and limited teaching time due to teacher absenteeism, which remains high, requires innovative learning approaches in the short to medium-term while systems strengthen their

human resources recruitment, training, support and deployment. One promising example of a foundational learning strategy that could "face both ways" for in and out-of-school children is technology-enabled, child-directed personalized learning. Most technology-based learning programs require students to have a certain level of basic literacy. One exception are the X-prize winners onebillion and KitKit School that have helped young children build literacy and numeracy skills starting from zero via solar powered tablets. In a collaboration with the government of Malawi and their partner VSO, the scaling non-profit Imagine Worldwide is testing the effectiveness of supporting foundational learning in schools with severely overcrowded classrooms. With 40 minutes a day of learning on the tablet, an initial randomized control trial found significant positive effects on overall gains in literacy and numeracy translating to 5.3 months of additional literacy learning.

Across all these contexts, whether children are in or out of school, the global education community has been increasingly paying attention to the important role of families in children's educational success. In our recent work *Collaborating to improve and transform education systems: A playbook for family school engagement* we found a number of creative family engagement strategies with strong evidence showing the positive effects on children's learning. From building community literacy skills and habits that support children's learning outside of school to SMS messages to caregivers for math practice with their children at home, there are many innovative approaches deployed in African communities. Some approaches, such as improve family-school communication on the benefits of education are highly cost-effective in helping improve student learning outcomes due to their ability to be implemented at wide scale. The COVID-19 pandemic and the likely growing instability facing many African communities makes strengthening family-school engagement no longer a nice to have but a crucial component of supporting children's learning.

Recommendation 3: Increase investments in improved models of learning that prepare African youth for the future of work

Africa is the youngest continent in the world and for many young people a quality, traditional secondary education can be difficult to come by. In sub-Saharan Africa before the pandemic, of the 98 percent of children who enroll in primary school, only 9 percent make it to tertiary education and only 6 percent graduate. University preparation is important but the main focus should be on flexible secondary education pathways that prepares young people for work. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the struggle of young people continuing their education.

Demands for secondary education has grown in the region following the large push with the Millennium Development Goals for universal primary completion. This is a particular concern for the countries housing the largest numbers of young people. In 2020, almost half of poor people in Sub-Saharan Africa lived in just five economies: Nigeria (79 million), the Democratic Republic of Congo (60 million), Tanzania (28 million), Ethiopia (26 million), and Madagascar (20 million). Serious investments must be made to deliver on these demands. According to the

Education Commission, sub-Saharan Africa needs to invest $175 billion per year through 2050 to support secondary education for all. This is a far cry from the $25 billion that was invested in secondary education in 2015.

Crucially, these investments must not come at the expense of continuing to support and strengthen primary education. Inclusive and equitable education systems must be built on a strong early learning foundation, otherwise it will be the most well-off young people who continue to access secondary education and leave their most marginalized peers behind.

This is an area that needs significant attention and it is a gap in the USG's education work globally. Currently, initiatives on workforce training for out-of-school youth reach only small numbers, and frequently are costly, and would not be sufficient for responding to the demand for secondary education. Instead what is needed is a reinvention of secondary education itself. Multiple, flexible pathways so that young people who drop out may have on roads to renter will be crucial. Many Africans are already experimenting with reinventing secondary education. For example, the Ministry of Education in Ghana is deploying a year-round, two-shift schooling approach to accommodate the large numbers of secondary school students interested in the limited seats in physical school buildings. A South Africa program is partnering secondary schools in marginalized communities with companies struggling to hire employees. A Nigerian early stage venture capital firm is betting on African education innovation and has started a Future of Learning Fund to seed the private sector education entrepreneurs.

Crowding in investment, innovative ideas, new actors, and robust partnerships to helping African youth chose from multiple secondary education learning models could be an important role the USG could play. This is an area that is particularly well suited to public-private partnerships. The whole of government Strategy on International and Basic Education lends itself well to this work given the wide range of agencies with diverse expertise, tools, networks that could be deployed to work on this topic. Mobilizing U.S. private sector actors could be one way of greatly expand the existing USG work on this topic.

Recommendation 4: Lead on system transformation in the face of climate change

Globally the education sector is just beginning to grapple with what a resilient, climate smart education system looks like. Finding ways to support flexible, adaptive education ecosystems that are resilient in the face of climate impacts and help spur climate action is something countries around the world will increasingly struggle with.

Already communities across sub-Saharan Africa are facing the climate related impacts on education. Climate change and its associated impact on weather and climate patterns widens inequality gaps in Sub-Saharan Africa. Floods, droughts, fires and heat spells, and heavy rain can lead to destruction of school buildings, roads, and bridges, reduce access to sanitation and food supplies, and contribute to the spread of vector borne diseases, all of which can impact school attendance rates, performance outcomes, and dropout rates. Disruptive weather events disproportionately affect girls and young women around the globe, particularly in low-income

countries, who are often forced out of school due to damaged infrastructure or other reasons. According to estimates from the Malala Fund, by 2025 more than 12 million girls are at risk of not completing their education every year as a result of climate change.

The USG has done some initial work in this area, particularly on disaster risk reduction. But it could play a much bigger role and exert real leadership in this area. Developing climate smart education systems is a cross-cutting endeavor. For example, supporting foundational literacy and numeracy materials that speak to topics in environmental education and youth post-primary education focused on green economy jobs. There is increasing demand from students, teachers, and communities to incorporate climate change education and political windows of opportunity with the first international agreement between Ministers of Education and Ministers of the Environment to collaborate to prioritize climate change education coming out of COP26.

High quality climate change education has the power to spur climate action but to date the education sector has not been at the table as a partner in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. Globally, less than 25% of countries' national plans to address climate change mention the education of children and youth. There are however effective approaches to build on to advance this work. In *Unleashing the creativity of teachers and students to combat climate change*, my coauthor Christina Kwauk and I highlight a range of practices including climate action projects at schools that both help build community resilience, deepen students science learning, and allow them to practice applying academic knowledge to solve problems in the real world.

In conclusion, I urge the USG to renew the whole of government Strategy on International and Basic Education when it expires in 2023 with attention to the above four recommendations. In 2010, I published a report titled *Punching Below Its Weight: The U.S. Government Approach to Education in the Developing World*. The title was in part in reference to the 13 USG agencies I found working on education in the developing world with very little coordination and collaboration. The Strategy on International and Basic Education has finally help address this by providing the policy support needed for agencies to collaborate and there are good examples of the synergies that result (e.g. CDC being brought in to train developing country ministries of education on COVID-19 information). A renewed whole of government strategy that brings additional funding, expertise, and networks to supporting education in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly on the areas above, would be one that truly punches above its weight.

Ms. BASS. Let me now introduce Ms. Yasmine Sherif.

STATEMENT OF YASMINE SHERIF, DIRECTOR, EDUCATION CANNOT WAIT

Ms. SHERIF. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, and I will really do my best to stick to the time. I have very long talking points here in testimony.

Distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to testify on improving access to quality education in Africa and the United States' leadership is critically important and we really appreciate the investments made by you.

So as I was introduced, I'm the director of Education Cannot Wait, which is the world's first global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crisis, the very global fund that is hosted by the United Nations, and we were founded and became operational in 2017.

The United States is a key donor to Education Cannot Wait and has pledged a total at $82.3 million and is, therefore, also one of our largest contributors, and these have been very timely contributions, especially in our cooperation with the United States in Africa where we worked in the Sahel and many other countries and the neighboring countries.

Now, for my testimony I draw on over 30 years of working with the United Nations in crisis countries, including in Africa, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, and have led many missions to the Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa.

When you go to the Sub-Saharan Africa, you see that of all the ordinances we have around the globe when it comes to the education sector, that is the most underfunded and the most, I will say, lacking the most basic infrastructure for quality education. They are truly those left behind.

Now, there are—the importance of education, we all understand that. If we do not provide young children and youth in Africa with education, not only is it a legal or a moral responsibility, but it's a game changer that will eventually have impact not only the African continent but all of us.

Here we speak about an estimated in total globally 128 million refugees and displaced populations in crisis of whom the majority are in Africa. So just imagine they not receive a quality education today how that will impact not only the region but the rest of the world in the near future.

So in Africa, especially, we also have to focus on girls' education and the benefits of investing in girls because that's also a benefit for the family and for the communities. And it's more about—it's not just about getting girls into school, but also making sure that they have a safe school environment to go to.

Just look at Nigeria and the Boko Haram where girls are being kidnapped going to school. So it's safety. It's about curriculum that are gender sensitized so that these young girls learn they can be empowered educated leaders, and it also is about nutrition, health. No child, no girl, can go to school on a hungry stomach.

Now, if you look at the situation across Africa, there have been, of course, achievements over the past 20 years. But we also know that there's a huge gap that remains.

In year 2000, almost a third of the primary school-aged children were out of school. Now, for 2019, this had decreased to 17 percent.

So in 19 years, we saw a decrease because investments were made and basic education were made compulsory across Africa. So this—indeed, progress has been made.

However, despite this progress, Africa continues to face the highest rate of out of school children and adolescents. The Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of education exclusion in Africa.

Over one-fifth of the children between the ages of six to 11 are out of school, followed by one-third of youth between the ages of about 12 to 14, and according to data from UNESCO's Institute for Statistics, almost 60 percent of school-aged children between ages 15 and 17 are not in school.

And so we see definitely that situation is going to worsen, and to achieve Sustainable Development Goal Four, access to a quality education, again, they are left further behind, and if we do not achieve that goal, all other sustainable development goals will fall behind because without an education we cannot have gender equality. We cannot eradicate poverty, hunger, and so forth.

So the scale of the challenge is quite remarkable. What is important for Education Cannot Wait is it's not enough to bring children and youth back to school. It's also to achieve learning outcomes where they actually learn something.

We need to make sure that teachers are properly trained. We make sure that we are not excluding the refugees and that we take a holistic whole of child approach and that we reach all girls and adolescents and focus on children with disabilities.

Ms. BASS. Thank you.

Ms. SHERIF. I'm afraid that my time is running out. I can see that. There's much more in my talking points. But, again, I thank you very much for inviting Education Cannot Wait, the Global Fund for Education Emergencies in the United Nations to provide this testimony.

Thank you very much, and thank you for all the generous support from the United States of America.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Sherif follows:]

Testimony of Yasmine Sherif

Director Education Cannot Wait

Hearing on Education in Africa

U.S. House of Representatives House Foreign Affairs Committees Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations

February 8, 2022

Distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to testify on improving access to quality education in Africa. Your leadership on this issue is critical.

I am the Director of Education Cannot Wait, the world's first and largest fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises.

Education Cannot Wait was founded in 2016 by international humanitarian and development aid actors, along with public and private donors, to establish education as a priority on the humanitarian agenda, usher in a more collaborative approach among actors on the ground, and foster additional funding to ensure that every crisis-affected child and young person is in school and learning. The United States is a key donor to Education Cannot Wait, and most recently pledged a $37m contribution to the fund in 2021 – the United States' Government's largest contribution to date. Today I would like to offer my thoughts on why this contribution is timely and critical to unlocking education access and quality in Africa, why education is important, and why continued commitment to education in Africa is necessary.

For this testimony, I am drawing on 30 years working within and outside the UN, including in international NGOs and as a lawyer specialising in international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. I have worked in some of the most crisis-affected countries in the world, including the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan, and led missions to many African countries affected by emergencies.

My experience in conflict and crisis-affected countries has made me aware of the urgency of the need for quality education across the African continent, the consequences of not meeting the educational needs of the most vulnerable children, and the opportunities offered by education and learning all children – including girls, children with disabilities and other marginalised groups.

In this testimony I will discuss the role of donors to education in Africa, particularly the role of the United States, and how investment in education in Africa serves the United States' interests and values. I will discuss the current state of education in Africa: the progress in delivering education access across the continent in the past 20 years, and the enormous challenges that remain.

The importance of education: Providing children and youth in Africa with an education is not only a legal and moral obligation – it is a game changer. In our globalized world, the United States' investment in Africa's education system is an investment in more resilient economies

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and in global peace. It is an investment in local African efforts to build strong nations. It is an investment in our common humanity and our common future. Investing in education in Africa is an investment in creating a qualified workforce that matches the needs of the local – but also global - labor market. It will cost the world and Africa more not to invest in its children.

While education for all children is crucial to African and global development and stability, girls' education has outsized benefits – not just for the individual girls, but for her family, community and country. Girls' education is about more than just getting children into school, but making sure they are safe there, and get the skills they need to compete in the labor market, make decisions about their lives, and participate fully in their communities. Educated girls are better equipped to make good decisions about nutrition and health, have fewer children at a later age, and have healthier families. They are more likely to have higher incomes, which can lift their households and communities out of poverty. Educating girls in Africa is likely to be one of the best development investments that donors such as the United States can finance.

Overview of Education in Africa: Over the past 20 years, Africa has made considerable progress in increasing access to education, particularly at primary level. In the year 2000, almost a third of primary school aged children were out of school – by 2019 this had decreased to 17 percent. Basic education is compulsory across Africa, and progress has been made to improve policy and legal frameworks to promote equal access to education for all children. We can see that committed and long-term investment in Africa's education systems – by national governments, local communities and also by donors such as the United States - has had huge positive outcomes.

However, despite this progress, Africa continues to face the highest rate of out-of-school children and adolescents in the world. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of education exclusion in Africa. Over one-fifth of children between the ages of about 6 and 11 are out of school, followed by one-third of youth between the ages of about 12 and 14. According to data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics, almost 60% of school-aged children between the ages of about 15 and 17 are not in school.

If the world does not act, the situation will likely worsen as Sub-Saharan Africa's school-age population continues to grow. However, the challenge of delivering quality education in Africa can also be viewed through a lens of opportunity and hope. Africa has a young population, with 3 out of 5 Africans under 25 years old. By 2050, Africa will be home to almost 40% of the world's children and adolescents. By investing in education, Africa and the world can unlock the continent's demographic dividend and invest in the human capital that will make the continent thrive.

The Sustainable Development Goals define the level of ambition that the world has set on education: Sustainable Development Goal 4 says that the world will "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". Given the high rates of out of school children in Africa, it is clear that tackling the education and learning crisis in Africa will be key to achieving the global Sustainable Development Goal. The leadership of the United States is crucial to meet this ambition.

The scale of the challenge: While remarkable progress has been made to expand access to education in Africa over the past twenty years, huge challenges remain. These include the disparities that continue to exist between countries, between groups (including girls, the poorest children, children with disabilities and displaced children), as well as the continuing learning crisis. Some of the most significant challenges are detailed below.

Learning: A key challenge for Education Cannot Wait and its partners is measuring and delivering not just improved access to education, but improved _learning._ Many children are in school, but simply not learning. The World Bank has estimated that 87 per cent of children in sub-Saharan Africa are 'learning poor' – unable to read and understand a simple text by the age of 10. Without timely improvement, the region is at risk of falling well of ending learning poverty by 2030. Based on current rates of progress, in 2030 about 43 per cent of children globally will still be learning-poor.

Teacher shortages: Teachers are one of the most central factors affecting children's learning in school. Africa needs more and better qualified teachers to deliver education at the scale and quality needed to meet SDG 4. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimates, approximately 17 million more teachers are needed to achieve universal primary and secondary education by 2030. Female teachers are particularly needed, as they have been shown to have a positive impact on the quality of girls' education and their continued attendance in school.

Displaced children: One of the most marginalised demographic groups in Africa are refugee and internally displaced children. These children are among the most at risk of being excluded from education services – and of being impacted by violence and poverty. Sub-Saharan Africa hosts over 26 per cent of the world's refugee population, and has the highest proportion of internally displaced children. Children represent nearly half of Sub-Saharan Africa's 19 million internally displaced people. Where children's education has been disrupted, children need remedial education and catch-up programmes to stop them from dropping out of school altogether. Learning environments must be safe and respond to the needs of all children – including the particular needs of girls and children with disabilities – providing WASH, healthcare, disaster risk reduction and psychosocial support.

For children who have never been able to access formal education, the availability of non-formal pathways is crucial. For example, in Somalia, Education Cannot Wait has provided internally displaced children who were overage or had never attended school with an accelerated curriculum, allowing them to catch up and re-join the formal system. The COVID pandemic has offered valuable lessons on how to use innovations to provide access to education. For example, by using home-based and distant learning programmes Education Cannot Wait supported 10.2 million children go to school despite school closures. Education Cannot Wait is also gathering evidence about effective ways to use technology to deliver distant learning where needed, to allow for continuity of education in the face of disruption or attack. For example, in Iraq, partners used apps like WhatsApp to provide information and lessons to children during school closures. In Mali, Education Cannot Wait is supporting

conflict-affected children to continue learning by distributing solar-powered radios broadcasting educational programming.

Reaching girls and adolescent girls: In sub-Saharan Africa, 32.6 million girls of primary and lower secondary school age remain out of school. This number increases to 52 million if we take into account girls of upper secondary school age. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, 9 million girls between 6 and 11 will never access school. When families do not have resources for food, transport, school fees, uniforms, and essentials like sanitary products, girls are the first to stop having access to school. Girls are also often at highest risk of other dangers, including child marriage and abuse. In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, a key priority for the continent will be to close the gaps in education between girls and boys, and particularly to focus on keeping adolescent girls in school.

Reaching children with disabilities: Children with disabilities are particularly likely to face barriers to accessing education. Children with disabilities are marginalised as a result of stigma, lack of assistive technologies and other services needed to give them fair and equal access to learning opportunities. Having a disability also places children at a higher risk of physical abuse and exploitation. If Africa is truly to achieve education for all, children with disabilities must be included as part of governments', donors' and implementers' programmes, policies and priorities.

Climate change: A further important issue is the challenge faced by Africa from climate change. The climate crisis is not some distant future problem for children and young people – climate shocks are disrupting education systems today. Africa's Sahel region is particularly at risk, with droughts and floods becoming more frequent, and impacting food instability and conflict. In 2020, over 4,000 schools in Central Sahel were shut down, due to violence and the threat of violence. We know that the frequency and severity of climate-related disasters is only going to increase. It is highly likely that the Sahel crisis is tragically the 'canary in the coalmine' – the indicator of what other vulnerable regions can expect from climate change – and the impact on children has been devastating.

The climate crisis frequently affects education systems in contexts that are already impacted by conflict and poverty: creating complex, interrelated emergencies. Climate shocks have caused extreme weather events that have damaged or destroyed schools, or made it impossible for children to reach school. The resulting absenteeism, dropout and poor learning environments are having devastating consequences on learning. Reaching displaced children with quality education is an enormous challenge. Further, climate change disproportionately affects the most vulnerable children, including poor children, girls, and young people with disabilities. Four out of every five people displaced by climate change are female. When displaced children are not able to access education, they are at high risk of sexual exploitation, early marriage, child labour and recruitment by armed forces.

The good news is that providing children – especially girls – with a quality education is one of the most powerful strategies for building the resilience of communities to climate change. Evidence shows that countries that have invested in girls' education have suffered far fewer

losses from droughts and floods than countries with lower levels of girls' education. Children with literacy, numeracy and critical thinking skills can support their families to respond more effectively to climate risks. Global leaders must urgently make the link between education and climate change not just in theory but in their financing and programming decisions. If the world is to reach the Sustainable Development Goal targets on education in Africa, we urgently need to 'climate proof' education services.

Impact of COVID-19: The United Nations estimates that since March 2020, 1.5 billion children have experienced prolonged interruption to their education caused by school closures during the pandemic. UNICEF has found that globally, 31% of students lack access to remote and distance-learning opportunities. School-age children in sub-Saharan Africa are the most significantly affected by the shift to distance learning, with nearly 9 in 10 children lacking access to online learning opportunities at home. Pandemic restrictions have not just affected children's access to school – they have also affected learning. Many children have missed at least two thirds of an academic year. In the absence of educational opportunities, children have experienced learning losses equivalent to a period far longer than the duration of school closures. Girls, in particular, are at increased risk of drop out, due to violence at home and social pressures such as early marriage. UNESCO estimates that 11 million girls will drop out of school due to economic impacts caused by COVID-19. The learning losses caused by this pandemic could result in lost earnings amounting to a tenth of global GDP. And of course, the failure to achieve foundational skills has profoundly negative consequences for individual children and their ability to fulfil their potential.

That these effects are likely to be worst felt by the poorest and most vulnerable children, who have so much to gain through education, is particularly tragic. The economic impacts of the pandemic are squeezing education budgets at a time when they are most needed. Before the pandemic, there was already a $148bn annual education spending gap – this is likely to rise to $200bn following the COVID crisis. If Africa is to recover from the impacts of the pandemic, governments and donors will need to mobilise effective back-to-school campaigns that reach the children who are least likely to return. These campaigns must also target the children who never had access to education in the first place, and tackle the barriers that prevented them from enrolling in and staying in school. Education systems also need to be properly resourced to deliver effective remedial education, including catch-up classes and accelerated learning programmes, to mitigate against the impacts of the pandemic on learning outcomes.

Education Cannot Wait's work in Africa: While the scale of the challenge can seem insurmountable, Education Cannot Wait and other organisations working on education in emergencies have demonstrated time and again that it is possible to deliver quality education for children in urgent need, even in the most challenging of crisis-affected settings. Education Cannot Wait is at the forefront of global efforts to deliver education to children in emergencies. Education Cannot Wait works by providing initial seed funding for its country programmes, and seeking co-funding contributions from donors, to drive an aligned approach to crisis response in the education sector. To date, Education Cannot Wait has reached 4.6 million children and adolescents affected by crisis, and approved 24 Multi-Year Resilience

Programmes globally, of which 60% are in Africa. Education Cannot Wait is financing programmes in 14 crisis-affected African countries, in which it targets over 13.3 million children who urgently need support to access quality education. These include refugees, children who have been displaced internally, and children in the communities hosting displaced people. These programmes deliver safe and protective learning environments that are accessible to all children, and that support their mental health.

Supported by the United States and other donors, Education Cannot Wait-funded programmes include disaster risk reduction interventions, and support to mitigate against the effects of climate change. Education Cannot Wait aims to bridge the gap between urgent, humanitarian education support, and longer-term development in the education sector, so that countries can transition from emergency responses to establishing the foundations for stability, peace, and prosperity.

Education Cannot Wait's response to COVID-19: Education Cannot Wait and other organisations working on education in emergencies and protracted crisis have also demonstrated that they have the capacity to respond to new and unpredictable global risks and events. For example, shortly after World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the pandemic, Education Cannot Wait responded rapidly and decisively to the global crisis, initiating a plan just two weeks after the first COVID-19 case appeared in an Education Cannot Wait -supported country. Within just 21 days Education Cannot Wait mobilized $23 million from reserves, and a further $22.4 million was approved in July 2020. This funding was distributed to 85 grantees in 32 crisis-affected areas across the world to make sure that children and adolescents could continue learning. Over 75 percent of COVID-19 response programmes were disbursed within eight weeks, making this Education Cannot Wait's fastest disbursement of funds to date.

Education Cannot Wait's rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic allowed tens of millions of students to be reached with interventions before education loss irreversibly changed their futures. Twenty-four grantees reached more than 29.2 million children and adolescents (51 percent of whom were girls), including over 1.43 million refugees (49 percent of whom were girls). ECW's COVID response also reached nearly 1 million Internally Displaced Persons, and 16.2 million young people from other affected populations, and over 65,000 children with disabilities. This support included provision of continued primary education programmes, as well as pre-primary and secondary programmes. Our experience of delivering during the pandemic demonstrates that even when crises hit suddenly, and where financing mechanisms must respond at-scale, such rapid response is possible. Funds such as Education Cannot Wait have not just the mandate but also the ability and experience to responsibly distribute at-scale funding where it is needed most.

United States' support to Education Cannot Wait: In September 2021, USAID Administrator Samantha Power announced the United States, through USAID and the U.S. Department of State, would contribute an additional $37 million to Education Cannot Wait. The $37 million contribution - the U.S. Government's largest contribution to date - highlights the United States' commitment to lead in education in crisis and conflict. The contribution includes $5

million dedicated to continued learning and resilient education systems for conflict-affected communities in northern Mali. The United States has a long history of supporting Education Cannot Wait both in terms of advocacy and financial support since the fund's inception. This leadership has been critical to the fund's ability to expand to deliver education services to countries with the most urgent need. The United States is one among a number of crucial donors to the fund, including the United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, Ireland and Norway, as well as a number of private sector organisations such as the Lego Foundation. The United States' leadership leverages support from multiple global donors, setting high standards for long-term commitment to an often-overlooked sector that faces serious financial need.

Financing is a key challenge for the education sector, as donor countries have started shifting budgets away from aid. And in developing countries, the economic consequences of the pandemic risk squeezing education budgets at a time when they are most needed. Between now and 2024, an additional $1.3bn is needed to fully fund Education Cannot Wait's Africa-based multi-year programmes. Funds like Education Cannot Wait must be properly resourced so that they can respond in the growing number of emergency situations where crises exceed governments' capacity to continue to deliver essential education services. Donors such as the United States and multilaterals need to make sure that they work with country governments to prioritise and fund quality education systems. Global leaders must reflect the urgency and importance of education systems in their financing and programming decisions. The world must stand together to meet its commitments to the children of Africa to deliver against the Sustainable Development Goals – because the consequences of a generation of children who cannot read, write and meet their full potential is too disastrous to contemplate, and should be unacceptable to us all.

I urge all Members here to consider the role that a quality education has played in their own lives. If all children in the poorest countries in the world could access quality education, the world would be better placed to face the urgent challenges it faces in response to conflicts, crises and climate change. As the developed world begins the process of recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, Education Cannot Wait will set an ambitious target of mobilizing more than 1 billion dollars for the trust fund. With these funds, we plan to leverage an additional 2 billion USD for multi-year investments, through in-country contributions that match Education Cannot Wait seed funds.

Getting Sustainable Development Goal 4 on track in Africa will not just require financing, but also a targeted collective effort to prioritise learning and access to education, particularly for the most marginalised. I hope the United States continues to play a central role in the delivery of education programming in Africa – particularly in emergencies and protracted crises. We hope you continue to stand alongside crucial funds such as Education Cannot Wait as we face the challenges of delivering education that meets the needs of today and tomorrow's Africa – and upholds the rights of all children to a quality education.

Ms. BASS. Thank you very much.

Our final witness is Mr. Robert Kaufman.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT KAUFMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ABAARSO NETWORK

Mr. KAUFMAN. Thank you, Chair Bass, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished members of the committee for an opportunity to testify at this hearing.

My name is Rob Kaufman, and I'm the executive director of the Abaarso Network. I'm here to share extraordinary stories of success and lessons we can draw from this experience to improve access to quality education in Africa.

In 2009, and American social entrepreneur set out to create a rigorous, inclusive high school that would transform Somaliland.

Despite the fact that many of our students entered with little or no English—some had never even been to school before—they absolutely thrived. In a few short years, our graduates were earning full scholarships to some of the world's most elite universities.

There was Mubarak, a nomad who had never been to school before, who earned a full scholarship to MIT, and Nadira, whose father was reluctant to send his daughters to school at all, who very likely became the first woman from Somaliland to get a full scholarship to an Ivy League school when she was accepted at Yale.

In the last 8 years, more than 200 Abaarso students have earned over $37 million in scholarships for schools around the world.

That's not even the best part of the story. While the Abaarso model is highly successful, we needed a scalable model built around local staff and day schools to reach thousands more. So we created the Kaabe model, the first ever Montessori primary schools in Somaliland.

Today, there are three Kaabe schools serving over 200 students. In order to staff our Kaabe schools, we created an all-female residential college called Barwaaqo University that today offers one degree, a degree in education.

Last year, we had our first graduating class. Sixteen women graduated and we hired 15 of them. As we continue to grow, many alumni have returned from abroad to teach or manage our schools.

In fact, both Barwaaqo and Kaabe included Abaarso graduates as co-founders. How did Abaarso realize such success in one of the most fragile and complex settings in the world? Here's a brief explanation, although definitely not comprehensive.

From the beginning, Abaarso set extremely high expectations. Students go to class five and a half days a week and have significantly more learning time than typical schools.

By the time someone graduates from Abaarso, they know what's at stake: opportunities for scholarship, self-improvement, and a career, and they have the skills and confidence to achieve them.

Our founding teams worked with local leaders to ensure that we honored local customs, like including a mosque on campus and the establishment of a local board.

The mission of the school—to graduate the leaders of tomorrow and transform Somaliland—is reinforced every day. We fully expect Abaarso graduates will be leaders at the highest levels of public

service and commercial enterprise, driving development, innovation, and inclusion.

The stories of success inspired huge demand. Parents like Nadira's father, once skeptical about Abaarso, have become some of our most vocal advocates. Today, we accept less than 3 percent of our applicant pool.

Here are three recommendations to take from our experience that would help improve access to quality education in Africa.

One, investing in quality with better teachers. More than computers or any other resource, the teacher is the single biggest factor in student success. Provide a great teacher and you can change the trajectory of a child's life.

Two, generate demand by incentivizing success. In many communities throughout Africa, sending a child to school may jeopardize a family farm or business. There is often little sense that it will lead to genuine opportunity.

We have to change the cost benefit analysis so that families believe the education offered is worth their time and money. Curricula that are context specific and partnerships with local employers give students the skills and networks to be competitive in local markets.

And three, more access. We have to redefine public education. Government alone will never be able to manage the supply side of education. We must leverage the impact of—the interest of impact investors, social entrepreneurs, and others to mobilize resources.

NonState schools are already ubiquitous in much of Sub-Saharan Africa. These schools can work in tandem with local authorities. Influential partners should energize and finance public systems and support choice and scaling models that work.

In conclusion, Abaarso Network is a rare solution in a fragile setting, with evidence of success raising learning outcomes, creating gender equity, and increasing productive employment.

Abaarso was fortunate to get support from USAID ASHA in 2015. But we first had to prove our success. And since ASHA only funds secondary and post-secondary schools, we still had to raise philanthropic dollars for primary schools.

To scale up quality education in Africa, partners must capitalize on demand for these models and support their growth. Replicating models that work is in the interest of the government from the United States. Failure to improve access to quality education breeds poverty and leaves few options for young people, which can drive violence and extremism.

When people have tasted a great offering and are hungry for more, the U.S. should put its full weight behind these programs and give youth and their families a reason to hope.

As Abaarso has shown, doing show can transform entire communities.

Thank you, Chair.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kaufman follows:]

Testimony of

Robert J. Kaufman
Executive Director, Abaarso Network

Hearing on "Improving Access to Quality Public Education in Africa"
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights

10:00 a.m. EST, Tuesday, February 8

Thank you, Chair Bass, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished members of the committee, for an opportunity to testify at this hearing. Your leadership on education and development in Africa, global health and global human rights shows a strong commitment to improving access to quality public education in Africa.

The story of Abaarso School

It's 2009 in the Horn of Africa. Imagine a war-torn country, where 100% of schools were destroyed. Where only 26% of primary school-age children were able to get back into school, and less than 10% went on to secondary education (HALI, Education Fact Sheet – Somaliland). Where students typically start high school with only 3rd grade level of Math and 1st grade English. All inside a society with incredibly limited interaction with foreigners and a distrust of the outside world. Imagine an American social entrepreneur with a profound commitment to make a difference, who sets out to create a rigorous, inclusive high school from scratch that would transform the country. Now imagine four years later, when Nimco Ahmed Ismael graduates from this new school, becoming what is believed to be the first in three decades from this war-torn country to be admitted to a US college on full scholarship. Several of Nimco's classmates were close behind, earning scholarships to American colleges the same year, including Mubarik Mohamoud, who was accepted by MIT, where he went on to major in computer science and engineering.

Fast forward 12 years later and over 200 alumni from Abaarso School have earned more than $37M worth of scholarships to study abroad, attending such prestigious institutions

as Harvard, Yale and Brown, among other Ivy League Schools. Many Abaarso graduates have now returned home to help rebuild their country. The success of the first school has been replicated to create four more schools, including three primary schools and an all-female, residential university.

This is the story of the Abaarso Network, an innovative and growing education ecosystem that enables transformation at scale by offering extraordinary education opportunities at the primary, secondary and post-secondary level in Somaliland, an area largely neglected by international donors and lenders.

For this testimony, I will draw on nearly 30 years of work as an educator and director of organizations and programs providing opportunity and hope to those who need it most, often in the world's most challenging places. I began my career in 1993 studying strategies to resolve conflict across context in Benin, West Africa. In 2001, I co-founded McAuliffe Regional Charter Public School in Framingham, Massachusetts and served as its Executive Director for six years. More recently, I spent four-plus years as the Deputy Director of sub-Saharan Africa for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, supporting communities to respond to humanitarian and development crises. Today, I am the Executive Director of the Abaarso Network, and I am here to share with you an extraordinary story of success, from which I will draw recommendations about how we can restore hope and opportunity through education in the most fragile, low-resource settings in the world.

In poor communities throughout the world, in remote areas with marginalized populations, in refugee camps and urban slums, I have seen children excluded from education or grossly under-served by their schools. At nearly every stop, I met people who were fighting to keep hope and opportunity alive. When I spoke with parents and children about their challenges and their future, I knew that I could be talking to someone with the moral courage of Nelson Mandela, the intellect of Albert Einstein, the craftsmanship of Chinua Achebe, or the athletic skill of Michael Jordan. If only they had the chance.

That's the problem; millions of children do not have an opportunity to learn, let alone to meet their full potential.

The problem in Africa

Rye Barcott, a Marine and a Harvard graduate coined the phrase, "Talent is universal; opportunity is not" in his 2011 book describing his experience working in the Kibera slum of Nairobi, Kenya. UNICEF estimates 105 million children in Africa were not in school before the pandemic. That's 41% of the school age population in Africa, without an opportunity to learn, and that number has grown dramatically in the past two years. In sub-Saharan Africa, less than half of all schools have access to safe drinking water, electricity, computers or the internet. We are not even close to gender parity; young women in Africa are over 1.5 times less likely than young men to be employed or to receive an education (https://blogs.worldbank.org/africacan/minding-gender-gap-training-sub-saharan-africa-five-things-know).

According to a recent UNICEF report, of those who do have access to school, only 35% will leave primary school with the minimum level of reading proficiency, and 22% in mathematics. A 2017 research paper by the American Economic Association called, "Enrollment without learning: Teacher Effort, Knowledge, and Skill in Primary Schools in Africa" found that teacher absenteeism cut intended classroom time in half. In many cases, teachers lack sufficient competency in their subject area.

Of those who do graduate, many are not prepared for the workforce. The Global Business Coalition for Education estimates that by 2030, over 800 million school-age children in low- and middle-income countries will lack the basic skills to succeed after graduation.

The lack of coordination and communication between those that hire and those that prepare youth for work is making matters worse. A 2013 study by McKinsey on "Education-to-employment" noted the paradox: while 75 million youth are unemployed globally, nearly 40% of employers say they can't fill entry-level vacancies. This disconnect means that schools are not

graduating young adults with the skills and competencies that employers need, which contributes to extraordinary levels of youth unemployment.

The problem in Somaliland

All of these challenges are greatly exacerbated in Somaliland, where the Abaarso Network works. The most recent data assembled by the Ministry of Education and Science estimates that today, 32% of school age children in Somaliland are enrolled in primary school. Most of these will drop out before the fifth grade; enrollment in secondary school is still an abysmal 18% of the school age population, and even lower for girls. (Ministry of Education and Science, Education Sector Analysis, 2021). Nearly half of the young female population was illiterate in 2012 (45%), while literacy was 74% among boys (HALI, 2015).

Educational facilities are insufficient, and the workforce is largely unprepared. Fewer than 40% of all schools in Somaliland have drinking water, and there are 15 students for every one textbook. Teacher-student ratios are typically around 50 to one. There is little chance that a young girl in Somaliland will have a female role model at school. According to the Ministry of Education and Science, the percentage of secondary female teachers was just 4% in 2020/21. The President of Somaliland himself estimated his people need another 6,000 female teachers. Youth unemployment is even worse. More than 80% of female youth are unemployed and only 25% of youth overall have any sort of active, productive employment.

Why did Abaarso School work?

None of these challenges has prevented Abaarso Network scholars from realizing extraordinary success. Our students are not just getting better access to education, they are learning at astonishing rates.

Quality standards, inspiration & support

From the beginning, Abaarso set extremely high expectations for its students and its staff.

Academic standards were strictly enforced. Because most students enter so far behind grade level, the school devotes 7th, 8th and 9th grades to closing large learning gaps in all subjects. Students at Abaarso are in class five and a half days each week, for approximately thirty hours total, focusing on intensive mathematics, science, English, creative and critical thinking. Students receive two to three times the math hours of a typical U.S. boarding school. Once the work ethic, language skills and fundamentals are in place, the upper school years focus on advanced studies, including the introduction of leadership classes and STEM vs. Humanities paths in grades 11-12.

This rigor and professionalism were affirmed and recognized when in 2017, Abaarso became one of few schools in sub-Saharan Africa to obtain a New England Association of Schools and Colleges accreditation, a status often reserved for the most elite and high-performing secondary schools in the United States.

The Abaarso School was, however, always about more than just grades and academic success. It's mission, to transform Somaliland, whose graduates become the leaders of tomorrow, is reinforced nearly every day. Community service is compulsory, and housekeeping at the school depends on student participation. Graduates learn that the privilege of an Abaarso education comes with the expectation that they will return home to become leaders in their communities, country, or on the world stage.

In the early years, the majority of our teachers came from the United States. They were young, highly educated and dedicated to the mission. Most importantly, they were focused on convincing students of the benefit of investing in their own education - they set high standards and provided the support, tough love and celebration of accomplishments that motivated students to meet those standards. By the time someone graduates from Abaarso, they know what's at stake – opportunities for scholarships, self-improvement and a career - and they have the skills and confidence to achieve them.

Results-driven demand

The success of our Abaarso scholars proved that students from Somaliland could compete on the world stage for some of the most coveted spots in the world's best academic institutions. Graduates went on to obtain post-secondary degrees in virtually every discipline, including engineering, computer science, politics, public health, economics, law and philosophy. Many have returned to Somaliland to start businesses and work with local companies, or have taken jobs in various ministries. A good number of graduates now work as teachers and administrators in Abaarso Network. Still others, have gone on to pursue master's and doctoral degrees.

Mubarik Mohamoud

Mubarik grew up in a nomadic family and only learned of school when he visited a refugee camp near where is family was living. There he met his grandmother who explained to a skeptical Mubarik, that the truck in the distance was not from nature, but something made by people who went to school. Mubarik only spent a week at the camp, but it piqued his interest in school. For years after Mubarik left the camp, he was hopeful to find an opportunity to go to school. Three years later he found it at Abaarso. When Mubarik entered Abaarso as a 9th grader, he knew virtually no English. Still, he thrived. After a couple of years at Abaarso School, he earned a scholarship to attend his junior year at Worcester Academy in Massachusetts, where he continued to excel. Upon his graduation from Abaarso, Mubarik received a full scholarship to attend MIT. At MIT, he worked on autonomous vehicles, only a few years after learning from his grandmother where cars came from! Mubarik graduated from MIT in 2017 with a degree in computer science and electrical engineering, and is now finishing a Master's degree at MIT.

The stories of Abaarso graduates have spread throughout Somaliland, inspiring others to go to school. Thousands of parents who had once been skeptical or worried if Abaarso presented a risk to local culture, have since been convinced and become some of our strongest and most vocal advocates. More families are sending their girls to school, and many throughout Somaliland have become more accepting of the role and potential of women as high-achievers and leaders in society. For example, Nadira Abdilahi's father did not support girl's education at first. Nadira's

older sister went on a hunger strike to convince her father to support her enrollment at Abaarso. When her father relented, a path opened up for Nadira to attend soon after. When she was accepted to Yale in 2016 as the first Somali female ever to go to an Ivy League school, it made news and drove pride throughout the country.

Inspired by these and so many other stories, the number of families and aspiring young scholars who want an Abaarso education skyrocketed. In the last three years, 5,087 people have applied for enrollment at Abaarso School. Unfortunately, we were only able to take 143 new students, or 2.8% of the applicant pool. Importantly, nearly 50% of our school population is female.

In the coming decades, we fully expect graduates from Abaarso to be leaders at the highest levels of public service and commercial enterprise, driving development, innovation, and inclusion throughout the country.

Local knowledge and cultural understanding.

From the beginning, Abaarso's founders and staff who came from outside Somaliland knew they must honor and respect local culture and build support from within the community. Abaarso teams worked closely with local religious and community leaders to adapt the curriculum and schedule for daily life to ensure that we honored local customs and preferences. Context-specific adaptations included a mosque on campus, strict gender separation in dorms and classrooms, required Islamic and Somali classes, and the establishment of a local Abaarso School board.

School leadership also recognized the additional challenge of clans and regions across Somali culture and made it a policy to proactively seek out diverse groups, and then include, accept and provide scholarships to Somalis of all types. Tutoring classes taught by Abaarso students and scholarships were offered to local primary school students and orphans, several of whom have gone on to have the same extraordinary success as other Abaarso graduates.

Scaling leadership and opportunity

In order to meet the huge demand and broad range of needs within the community, our flagship secondary school was spun off into two other institutions, Barwaaqo University and Kaabe Schools. These institutions were designed to meet two specific needs: better access to an affordable world-class primary education; and a dramatic increase in well-trained female teachers.

Fortunately, after years preparing the next generation of leaders, our growth was supported by our own graduates. After graduation from Oberlin College on a full scholarship, Nimco Ahmed Ismael returned to Somaliland and took a leadership role in Abaarso Network, helping to found Barwaaqo University.

Barwaaqo was launched in the fall of 2017 as the only all-female boarding university in Somaliland. The university was founded to empower Somali women to become professionals who will drive development throughout their society. Currently, the university, which enrolls over 130 women, includes a School of Education with a focus on the Montessori approach to primary schools. The Government of Somaliland has recognized that Barwaaqo will help fill an urgent skills gap in the education employment sector, and create positive ripples for many years to come.

While still young, our track record of education-to-employment from Barwaaqo University is 100%! We've had one graduating class to date, and we hired 15 out of 16 graduates to work as primary school teachers in our Kaabe system. The other graduate went on to work with her family. Thus, the Network is serving to both educate young students and sustain young professionals. This combined effect is sending a positive signal to our Somali community and the momentum is building.

Kaabe opened in 2019 as the first and only Montessori-inspired primary school system in Somaliland. Again, the Abaarso Network was supported by alumni who returned from study abroad play major professional roles. Qadan Mohamed and Warsan Mohamed were founding teachers at Kaabe and now serve as teachers, administrators and a source of inspiration for students and staff. Today, Kaabe schools serve kindergarten through grade 3, and will expand into secondary grades in the coming years. Kaabe schools are staffed by graduates of Barwaaqo University, who are specifically prepared to teach the Montessori curriculum. Today, three Kaabe Schools serve nearly 240 students and we expect to open new schools later this year. If local interest from families and even young students continues, we'll have trouble keeping up with demand.

Ido Ibrahim

In the summer of 2019, Ido Ibrahim was 10 years old, and her family had no intention of sending her to school. Despite both her brothers being given the opportunity to pursue education, Ido's parents planned for her to stay home to cook, clean, and help care for younger children in the family. When we started construction of the first Kaabe School near her home, Ido made it her personal mission to enroll herself. She stopped by every day to petition with her limited English: "Ido me. School?" Again, and again she visited. Because we were so close to her house, her family finally agreed to let her attend. Ido was well outside our intended age bracket, but the idea of her not having access to any education was unthinkable. Two years later, Ido is one of the top Kaabe students and has rapidly learned English in our immersion environment. She leads vocally and by example, always helping the younger students find their way. The teaching team could not imagine Kaabe without Ido, and Ido cannot imagine life without school.

By continuing to grow our Barwaaqo class of local teachers, the Kaabe system is scalable, sustainable, and operated predominantly by homegrown Somali talent.

Recommendations for improving access to quality education in Africa

If the Abaarso Network can create successful school systems at the primary, secondary and post-secondary levels in one of the world's most fragile, low-resource and internationally neglected regions, surely it is possible to replicate this success elsewhere.

First, we must understand that improving education in Africa is about more than increasing the number of schools and teachers. Expanding and improving quality education in Africa requires *better quality* in what is being offered, *greater demand* for education, and *more access* to better schools.

1. *Improve quality – Better teachers and classes*

It is cliché to say, but teachers really do shape the future of millions of children; and, in-turn impact entire generations of society. Numerous studies show that when a poor teacher becomes a great teacher student learning increases exponentially. Indeed, it has been clearly demonstrated that, more than computers or other resources, the teacher is the single biggest factor in predicting the educational success of the child (Jennifer King Rice, 2003). Several national programs, such as those in Finland, Japan and Singapore, have demonstrated that putting a premium value on teachers can elevate entire systems and millions of students. More schools and partnerships for greater opportunity after school won't change learning if the teachers are not prepared.

A prepared teacher is one that is deeply committed to student success, competent in the content, and proficient in contemporary pedagogy, including digital media. Change this one factor, and you can change the entire trajectory of child's life.

Making teaching more competitive and better remunerated in Africa will help elevate the status and professionalism of teachers. Through electronic media and high-frequency reporting from

teachers, we can make them more accountable and provide feedback on progress. Subsidized, continuous and paid time for professional development can make teachers more proficient in both content and pedagogy.

2.   Greater demand – More local buy-in and greater incentives for success

We take it for granted that parents want to send their children to school, but this is often not the case in poor and remote communities. In many communities throughout Africa, sending a child to school may jeopardize a family farm or business that depends on the child's help. If the child does go to school, there is often little sense that it will lead to genuine opportunity. Families and the children themselves are performing a simple cost-benefit analysis, and determining that the education available to them is not worth the time and money.

Increasing access to quality education requires that we generate demand for quality education. We have to give children and their families a reason to believe; we have to change their cost-benefit analysis. Relevant learning and relationships that make the next step in the learning life-cycle, such as a scholarship or a job, possible are essential to motivating kids to go to school.

Curricula that are context specific, and partnerships with local employers can give students the skills and networks to be competitive job seekers. Secondary and post-secondary programs should be developed with specific sectors in mind and even co-designed with local, private sector partners. Local governments should provide economic incentives for partners to offer internships and apprenticeships to high-performing students. Local telecom companies should invest in their communities by ensuring free wifi access for students.

There are also cultural factors at play. Culturally specific gender roles have impacted the implementation of girl child education in some areas for decades (Lee, 1999. CETA Girl Child Education Project. The Foundation for International Training). Schools that are governed by outsiders and disconnected from the local community may not inspire participation. Innovative

governance models that prioritize performance accountability and ensure local ownership can help bridge cultural gaps and encourage new behavior, like sending girls to school and increasing local investment in schools. Local governance helps ensure education programs and policies that reflect local interest and customs, and can inspire a sense of pride in the opportunity that schools provide.

While these adaptations would generate more demand for school, students will still need support to make use of the opportunity they've been given. Counselors who assist with next-level applications and job-placement are essential to supporting students and families to manage those steps. These things are routine in the United States not because it is a luxury we can afford, but because such support is critical to ensuring learners move on to the next stage of their lives.

3.   More access - Redefine "public education" to invest models that work

Government alone will never be able to finance or manage the supply-side of education alone. We must leverage the interest among impact investors, social entrepreneurs, faith-based organizations and others to mobilize resources and take responsibility for establishing more schools and more teacher training programs.

Non-state schools are already ubiquitous in sub-Saharan Africa and currently serve millions of children. In some areas, like Nairobi, Lagos, Accra and Kampala, non-State schools serve the vast majority of students, including some of the poorest and most vulnerable (James Tooley, The extraordinary grassroots movement of low-cost private education). Given the supplemental fees that most "free" public schools charge throughout Africa for books and uniforms, among other things, many non-State schools are only marginally more expensive than public schools. Furthermore, a study titled, "The Impact of Non-State Schools in Developing Countries" by Laura Day Ashley from University of Birmingham and Joseph Wales of the Overseas Development Institute confirmed what many of us in international education have suspected, that non-State schools are often more inclusive and have better learning outcomes.

These non-State nschools don't have to be in competition with the public sector; they can supplement the public system, and work in tandem with local authorities or as public-private partnerships. The best education today features experiences for students (including internships with businesses and other organizations) that take place in the community and beyond the walls of the school. Encouragement from influential partners like the US Government, multilateral facilities like the World Bank's Human Capital Project, and improved local regulations can energize and finance public systems that support more choice and options to establish schools in underserved communities.

Conclusion – When we find things that work, we must make them ubiquitous!

Improving access to quality public education in Africa may seem like a daunting challenge, but we have examples of success to follow. The Abaarso Network is one of a few positive deviants; a solution in a fragile setting, with evidence of success in raising learning outcomes, creating gender equity, and increasing productive employment among men and women. We have a chance to leverage this success and others like it; to replicate, grow, nurture and understand them so that these systems may evolve, branch out throughout the continent and meet needs of specific communities.

Support for innovation should reward success, and Abaarso was no different. Abaarso's founding team had to fight and scrap to make this school work. The years and effort of bootstrapping our way to success were essential to securing local buy-in and demonstrating proof of concept. Only then could we attract outside investment. In 2015, USAID/ASHA (Association for Schools and Hospitals Abroad) began to fund expansion at both our Abaarso School and Barwaaqo University campuses. While this support will not be enough to scale the network of schools across Somaliland and in other fragile settings, we can be sure that the world has answers to dramatically improve access to quality education in Africa.

Replicating this success is in the best interest of the US Government, not just families in at-risk settings. The lack of education suppresses employment, and exacerbates gender inequality and poverty. Poverty breeds insecurity. Youth and at-risk communities need alternatives to violence; they need an opportunity for self-improvement, and a dynamic population that can create jobs and solutions to their own development challenges. Failure to improve access to quality education will drive violent extremism. When there are clear successes, when a people have tasted a great offering and are hungry for more, the United States should put its weight behind these great ideas, and give more youth and their families a reason to hope. Doing so can transform entire communities.

Ms. BASS. Thank you very much, Mr. Kaufman.

I want to thank the witnesses for their testimony and we will now question witnesses under the 5-minute rule. But before we begin, I'll start with questions. Let me ask Erica if you would come back with a little instruction for members and witnesses.

Ms. BAGANZA. Sure. Hello, everyone. So the timer—the easiest way to see the timer and ensure that you are within the 5-minute time allotment is if you go up to the right hand corner and click layout. You can click the option of grid. Then you will be able to see the 5-minute timer.

Or, additionally, you can click the stack option. Hover over the timer. There is a button with three little dots on it. Click that and press move to stage. Therefore, the timer will remain stationary and it'll be within your view.

Hopefully, that is more helpful to everybody.

Ms. BASS. Thank you very much, Erica.

I would like to ask my first question to Dr. Winthrop, who was in the middle of giving us recommendations around the READ Act and I wanted her to finish. I think she was on recommendation four.

Dr. WINTHROP. Thank you, Representative Bass, and I now see the timer, which I did not before. So that was helpful.

[Laughter.]

Dr. WINTHROP. Yes. Recommendation four was, basically, the idea that climate change is here and education systems are not prepared, and we in the education sector have not really put—globally, put our arms around how—what would a climate smart education system actually look like.

And this is something that the U.S. Government has started to do. I think, you know, with the whole of government approach in the basic ed strategy it could really be a leader in this space and there's huge need, given what I said before about the fact that, you know, only 25 percent of countries even mention education in their climate plans.

Ms. BASS. Let me ask you something, because you were talking about the innovation on the ground and when—and talking about the READ Act and the fact that the READ Act funds educational organizations, it sounded as though you were emphasizing that we need to fund instead of the massive NGO's that are U.S.-based or other countries that we need to fund African organizations. Is that what you were saying earlier?

Dr. WINTHROP. That is what I was trying to say, though perhaps not as clearly as you. The new strategy—yes, go ahead.

Ms. BASS. I have a question to you and to also Dr. Sengeh, who I'll move to in a quick second because I only have 3 minutes left.

How do we identify those organizations and are there particular countries that have a number that we should focus on—a number of strong organizations?

Dr. WINTHROP. I think that actually there are lots of people who could help—who could help the U.S. Government identify these strong organizations. We have a running list of several hundred. There's many other organizations that do that.

I would go to Minister Sengeh and his peers. The GPE has an entire civil society sort of empowerment theme. They could help identify organizations.

Ms. BASS. OK.

Dr. WINTHROP. So I think there's absolutely good ways to do it.

Ms. BASS. OK. Dr. Sengeh?

Mr. SENGEH. Yes. Yes. Thank you very much.

Ms. BASS. Let me ask you—hold on a second. You talked about GPE and that the United States needed to support that more. Are you suggesting that READ Act funding should go to that? But what about U.S. Government supporting the public sector of different countries and is there recommendations that you have there?

Mr. SENGEH. Yes, I do. I mean, I do think, yes, the U.S. should expand its support to GPE. GPE is the largest fund dedicated to developing countries and education, and I think the U.S. should definitely expand its support there.

And in terms of the conversation that you were just having with Dr. Winthrop, we actually just published a blog on the GPE website today that talks about an NGO consortium that includes global international NGO's and local NGO's who are working with governments to deploy lots of advanced solutions here, particularly with our response to COVID, and it's quite interesting to see what we're able to do together.

But other institutions like the MCC—you know, the MCC does not generally support education. But one of the metrics that are looked at for seeing whether a country is eligible is education and girls education and completion levels.

So I think that's also really important, and I will then say supporting things like MCC, which ultimately supports infrastructure based on the indicators like school completion, are all very important and I think that the U.S. Government can do.

Ms. BASS. You were—you mentioned the U.S. government's support, and I think you compared it to Denmark—was that support for GPE or was that support for something—another program?

Mr. SENGEH. That's—yes, thank you very much, Republican Bass. Representative Bass.

Ms. BASS. Thank you.

[Laughter.]

Mr. SENGEH. The U.S. Government, from inception, has paid, I think, about $550 million, whereas the Norwegian government has about $800 million cumulative to GPE, and I think that the U.S. Government can support more in GPE.

And the reason why I stress GPE is not because I'm on the board for it. It is because I know that Sierra Leone, for example, has benefited tremendously, and most of our programs, particularly with early childhood education and primary education, comes from such multilateral support.

Ms. BASS. OK. Thank you.

And I would now go to the ranking member, Mr. Smith.

Is Mr. Smith with us? If not—because I know he was going to have to step away. If not, I will go to Mr. Issa.

Mr. ISSA. Thank you very much. And Madam Chair, I was almost ready.

Mr.—no, I am—Mr. Kaufman, how does your organization tailor the curriculum to training students to reach—to make sure they receive and ensure that they're prepared for jobs?

In other words, it's very expensive to educate, generally. If we educate, generally, in Africa where there isn't enough money, we're, obviously, not going to educate the amount we need.

So how do you get that focus of education that leads to specific employment and how do you determine what those employment opportunities are?

Mr. KAUFMAN. That's great. Can you hear me all right?

Mr. ISSA. I sure can.

Mr. KAUFMAN. Great. Thank you. I appreciate the question.

It's so important that when we design a degree program at our university it's done in consultation with the private sector and the largest employers in Somaliland.

So right now, we have 100 percent education to employment from our graduates. But that's because our private sector partner is, largely, ourself.

We need to generate many more teachers in order to scale the Kaabe primary schools. So we're generating ready, professional, qualified educators and hiring them.

Our next degree will be a management degree, that we're talking with the leading CEOs and private sector companies throughout the country to make sure that they're informing our curriculum, and the people that they need to hire in the next five and 10 years are the ones that we're graduating.

So it's that partnership that's really key.

Mr. ISSA. That's great. What I'd like you to do, and I think each of our witnesses can help us in this, how do we contrast things like what we're doing—you know, what you're doing is very similar to what Ohio did with its land grant universities. All the original public universities were teaching universities because that had the greatest leverage for the future.

If you teach the teacher, you can then teach the next generation of students. But how does it—would you contrast that with how China is competing with us in Africa? What are they doing and what makes your program different?

Mr. KAUFMAN. Well, I have to admit, I'm not expert enough to comment on the Chinese government's strategy around education.

I can tell you that in Somaliland, because of its unique status as an unrecognized country that's formally considered part of Somalia, they do not have access to financial aid and assistance from most multilateral institutions or the Chinese government.

So in Somaliland, there's very little investment from the Chinese government. But, otherwise, we just need to make sure that from the primary school up through secondary and into our university that we're adapting the curricula based on the local context.

And I think it was Honorable Minister Sengeh who talked about that they were doing the same thing to make sure that their graduates were ready for the work force.

So I just think it's a matter of being flexible. But maybe Dr. Sherif can respond vis-a-vis China.

Mr. ISSA. Please.

[No response.]

Mr. Issa. Maybe I'll respond. My understanding is that China does not prioritize any actual equivalent of what we would call USAID for these kinds of purposes as some training programs related to their projects.

But I'm going to followup with just one question. The kind of support we're giving to your organization, Mr. Kaufman, are you seeing any other nation step forward and, if so, would you recognize them, either in Somaliland or in the case of the other witnesses?

Because I'd like to understand who our best partners are and I often see what we're doing, but I do not see similar partnerships with other countries.

Obviously, France has a huge presence. Are they doing something similar or helping in this project?

Mr. Kaufman. We do have some really strong partners but very few of them are financial sponsors, particularly from governmental entities.

The British government has been a good friend to the Abaarso Network in providing advice and support. But so far, they're not a financial contributor, and the government of Somaliland also has provided——

Mr. Issa. Thank you. Does anyone else have any examples of what the four nations——

Mr. Sengeh. Sure. In Sierra Leone—in Sierra Leone, I do think the EU is a great supporter of education so we will be able to see what the EU is doing. And now we have the Africa-EU Summit is just next week that many of the EU leaders will be at.

I think with China, for example, something that China does differently is with government grants at the higher and technical institutions. I benefited from scholarships in the U.S. but it wasn't through the U.S. Government.

And I think you see what the U.K. does through the Commonwealth Scholarships, or with the Chinese or the Russian, there are many country levels scholarships. We know that in the U.S. that's much different, and that's the major difference.

Ms. Bass. Thank you.

Mr. Issa. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Ms. Bass. Thank you.

Mr. Phillips?

Mr. Phillips. Thank you, Chairwoman Bass, and greetings to all of our witnesses today.

I think it's fair to say that U.S. support for public education programs in Africa cannot and shouldn't be a one-size-fits-all approach. So I'd love to talk about best practices, Mr. Kaufman and Dr. Sengeh, starting with you.

Mr. Kaufman, in fact, a group from Minnesota, my home State, from the Wellstone School traveled to your school, Abaarso, in Somaliland recently to see your secrets of success, and I know Sierra Leone has seen a lot of progress in accessing quality of education since they introduced universal public education just a few years ago.

And I'm sure there are many other successes in other countries and we'd love it if you might each speak to some of those. What

scalable and replicable and cost beneficial best practice models can other countries draw on to improve baseline education?

Mr.—Dr. Sengeh, if you want to start, I'd welcome your comments. Other models.

Mr. SENGEH. I mean, I think one of the things that's worked really well for us in Sierra Leone is this relationship between civil society, and not just with NGO's. It's not just about government to government, and we see that the relationship with civil society, the relationship with NGO's, including parents there.

And in Sierra Leone we have a decentralization for basic education that we're trying to move forward. So that also works very well in terms of effective models for quality education.

And something I do want to also emphasize and stress on is the use of technology and digitization, and there are different parts to that.

It cannot be disparate, you know. When COVID—with COVID school closures, every country had their own platform. I imagine in the U.S. every State had their own platform, their own systems, their own content.

And it does not work that way, and I think we really have to think about how we share the architectural and the technology systems such that we are taking advantage of our best resources in terms of quality content, quality platform, modes of engagement, that actually reaches and includes as many more people as possible.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Right. And just, quickly, before we move to Mr. Kaufman, any—are there any of the external development partners in Africa that have made interesting investments of which you're aware that we should take note of?

Mr. SENGEH. I think the EU and I think for girls education we do a lot of work with IrishAid. So I mentioned radical inclusion, which is—will stop at nothing until everybody, girls—but organizations like IrishAid.

FCDO—we do have a lot of work with them with evidence-based policy support from FCDO, and, as I mentioned, China with enhanced technical institution.

I think there does need to be, and I think one of the respondents mentioned, USAID needs to step up a little bit on education and I must say in Sierra Leone, we do not have a large footprint of USAID, particularly on education and innovation, and I feel like that's a miss for the U.S.

Mr. PHILLIPS. I appreciate the challenge to us. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Kaufman, any thoughts on scalable and replicable models that you think, you know, could be employed across the continent?

Mr. KAUFMAN. Yes. Thank you. First, let me just take a moment to acknowledge and really thank the group from Wellstone International School. They are a great—great friends of ours.

They've been out to the school and we have been talking with them about a deeper project to draw some of those lessons that can help kids in Minnesota and, perhaps, beyond.

Mr. PHILLIPS. I love it.

Mr. KAUFMAN. So thanks so much for acknowledging them.

Yes, there are a few really important takeaways that go beyond the three that I mentioned and I want to highlight those again.

It was said by a few of the witnesses that it's not just about access. It's not just about the supply side of schools. Equally critical is the quality of what we're offering and the relevance in the classroom. Good teachers make a huge difference and 10 great teachers are much better than a hundred bad or mediocre teachers.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Correct.

Mr. KAUFMAN. The other side of that is this demand piece—you know, the cost benefit analysis that families have to do to decide if it's worth the time and money to send their kids.

If there aren't job prospects, if there aren't post-graduate or secondary opportunities, if they're leaving a good primary school but have no decent secondary school to go to, then the incentive to continue your education is greatly diminished, and that has a deleterious effect on the prospects of employment, innovation, economic growth.

Just really quickly, the few other things I want to mention is I think that key are to scale or to incentivize, both with financial incentives and otherwise, public-private partnerships.

We have to promote choice. As you said, one size does not fit all. We need a proliferation of models, and then when we find one that works we have to hold on to it and invest in it.

The other thing is businesses can also be incentivized to provide not just scholarships but apprenticeships and internships, because in developed countries we know that your network plays a huge role in your job prospects post-graduation. We need to help kids in remote and fragile settings develop those same networks.

Mr. PHILLIPS. OK. I know I'm out of time. Thank you both. Appreciate your perspectives and contributions.

With that, I yield back, Madam Chair.

Ms. BASS. And thank you, Mr. Phillips. It's my understanding that Mr. Meuser is not here, so I will go to the committee vice chair, Representative Omar, who will chair the rest of this meeting.

Thank you very much, Representative Omar.

Ms. OMAR [presiding]. Thank you, Chairwoman Bass. Thank you for convening this really important discussion as well.

Mr. Sengeh, according to UNICEF, the COVID pandemic has created the worst crisis of education access on record. But you talked in your testimony about Sierra Leone's success in continuing to invest in education during the pandemic.

Can you tell us more about the programs you instituted to ensure students could continue to learn during COVID?

Mr. SENGEH. Thank you very much, Representative Omar.

Yes. I think one thing I must say is the leadership. His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio made education his priority, and so in 2018 we are at 19 percent of our budget and then we went to 20 percent, 21 percent, and we decided that we have to keep expanding the percentage of our budgets to education until we can reach our targets.

So it was really a leadership decision and understanding that the only way out of this and preparation for this pandemic is through public education. So we had to keep investing.

Some of the things that we did was we brought back all the kids who were in transition classes, give them dry rations and made sure that they did the examinations 5 months after school closed.

We expanded education radio. So now, as we speak, we bought transmitters and hoping to ensure that all across the country people can continue learning with educational radio, and the new EGRA EGMA study shows that about 87 percent of kids listen to education radio.

We also printed materials. We know that not everybody has access to technology so we printed materials and mailed it to communities who were hard to reach and who were not in radio reach or who could not have TV, and we built mobile systems, right.

So 87 percent of the population has access to mobile connectivity. So we built SMS USSD solutions that we made available to poor kids as well.

So it's really a combination, what we have—what we call hybrid technology solutions within the directorates of science, technology, and innovation, so things that work on paper, online, offline, mobile, that we really extended.

Ms. OMAR. OK. Excellent. And are there ways we can use some of these programs as a model for policies we should support in other countries in Africa and in the developing world?

Mr. SENGEH. Thank you. I think it's a great question.

By the way, something as well I think the U.S. can do is be part of what we call the Digital Public Goods. It's a platform that we have with the United Nations, with UNICEF, and within the Digital Public Goods framework is that we should build technologies and solutions that should be shared across the world, and I think the U.S., being a leading technology country, should see how it can be part of these global networks that create solutions for sharing for everybody.

I do think investing in education and data technology—ed tech—in ways that was not what we imagined before but, rather, that is inclusive, that does not leave poor communities out, that does not leave women and girls out, is something that you can invest in a little bit more.

Ms. OMAR. Thank you so much.

Ms. Sherif, does the United States provide enough assistance for education to refugees and displaced children, and what more could we be doing? As you know, I was a child in a refugee camp for 4 years and missed the opportunity to be educated in those 4 years.

Ms. Sherif, are you there?

Ms. SHERIF. Yes. Yes. Yes. Hold on. Hold on. Hold on. Hold on. Sorry. Sorry. I am here.

Ms. OMAR. OK. Did you hear the question or do you want me to repeat it?

Ms. SHERIF. Please repeat it. I'm so sorry.

Ms. OMAR. I was asking if you thought the United States provides enough assistance for education to refugees and displaced children, and what more could we be doing.

As you probably know, I was a child in a refugee camp in Kenya for 4 years and missed the opportunity to be fully educated while I was there.

Ms. SHERIF. Yes. We have—we did a special COVID–19 response where Kenya was included because they host a large number of refugees. So they have definitely provided support directly to Kenya.

We have also worked very closely with the U.S. in Burkina Faso, in Cameroon, and many other places. And the U.S., especially—the way the U.S. provided money to ECW—Education Cannot Wait—is one is from our trust fund in New York, and then they provide money in country because you have the USAID missions in country.

So they're always part of the Education Cannot Wait's programs. And so across the Sahel and in Kenya and refugee education. PRM has been very strong in refugee education.

So yes, my answer is yes. And the U.S. is often very flexible, very fast, very speedy.

Ms. OMAR. All right. Thank you so much. My time has expired, and I will now recognize Mr. Bera for 5 minutes.

Mr. BERA. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let me direct the first question to Mr. Kaufman. You know, I'm still on faculty at the University of California Davis and I've had conversations with both my chancellor but also the University of California system in general, and have thought about the utility of how we take the talents that we have within our university system but make that accessible to the rest of the world, whether that's, you know, in the farming agriculture sector or climate change, et cetera.

And what I've explored with them is, you know, we're able to interact in a virtual setting right now. Is there a way for us to build capacity so it's not that those students who are graduating now have to travel abroad and attend university, you know, in another country but can we in a virtual setting, and are there any examples where U.S. universities in a virtual setting are taking their talent, partnering with institutions in Africa and various countries, and doing some of that online training, which may, ultimately, lead to their students studying in the United States or elsewhere? And can we do that in low cost way that takes the talent and builds capacity in some of these countries?

Mr. Kaufman, maybe the question is for you.

Mr. KAUFMAN. Yes. Thank you. I appreciate it.

First of all, a few things. I think that an online support both for teacher training and for students is a super-efficient and effective way to expand opportunities. It's expensive to bring people and travel around the world. So I think there's more we can do that.

And if you're looking at ways to help share the expertise of UC Davis faculty and students, then we need it, and I think schools all around the continent need it.

The truth is, in a place like Somaliland and many other fragile settings we do not yet have the cadre of qualified teachers who are proficient in contemporary pedagogical strategies.

So until we bring them up to speed through support with different programs that you and others have mentioned, we're going to struggle to promote learning among kids.

So the more support we can get from people like your colleagues and students would be great and the more we can expand digital access would be really helpful.

And if I can, just a super quick response to Representative Ilhan Omar's question about does the U.S. Government do enough.

The answer is no. I'm grateful for all the support of the U.S. Government and you've done a lot. The U.S. Government has made opportunities possible that otherwise would not have existed.

But we need to do more. The risks are too great, not just in fragile settings but for spillover that can drive violent extremism if we do not give people a reason to hope and other opportunities.

Mr. BERA. Right. Let me ask a quick question to Ms. Winthrop.

You know, one of the areas that I've done some work is thinking about global fragility in fragile States in Sub-Saharan Africa and, you know, one of the best strategies is that investment in women and girls—you know, pregnancy spacing, you know, providing full reproductive access, but also that investment in girls education. I think you mentioned that in your opening Statement.

You know, when I was in Sierra Leone a few years ago, I also had a chance to visit some CARE-sponsored programs that were targeting boys and fathers, which, I think, if we want to get the full capacity of girls education we also have to start with boys so as those girls become young women, you know, and those boys become young men, there's that value in that recognition.

And I do not know, Ms. Winthrop, if you want to touch on that and how we cannot forget about educating boys.

Dr. WINTHROP. Thank you very much for the question.

Yes. It's true that if you—educating women and girls, especially up through secondary education, is—has such good ripple effects across a community.

But I have seen, running programs on girls education myself, if you really just focus on the girls and leave out the boys you'll have a backlash and you'll undermine your work.

But also, certainly, our scholars we work with on girls education around the world are saying the next frontier is really to make sure that boys are brought into the conversation around gender equality.

You know, it's no point in, you know, having a really empowered group of women if the men, their counterparts and peers, aren't right there beside them lockstep. So I think that is the next frontier for sure.

Mr. BERA. Right. Thank you. And I see my time has expired. So I'll yield back.

Ms. OMAR. Thank you. I now recognize Ms. Jacobs for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you, Madam Vice Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for being here.

I want to start with Dr. Winthrop. Thank you for talking about directly supporting local organizations in your testimony. I absolutely agree and think that we can do much more on this and that there are plenty of local organizations that the U.S. can and should support.

So I was hoping you could highlight some successful examples of USAID doing this well in the education sector in certain African countries, and maybe also describe the issue a little more with governments and partners wanting to find funding for their solutions without the many competing priorities that come with donors.

Dr. WINTHROP. Thank you. Thank you very much.

We hear a lot about this from our decades of work with African partners. One of the things we hear, and I'm sure Minister Sengeh

can attest to this, is that, you know, it's very hard to navigate the competing donor partners—the U.S. Government priorities, the U.K.'s priorities, EU's priorities, multilaterals' priorities—and that's part of why GPE is so helpful because they pool everybody together, and frequently what we hear is that folks on the ground feel like they do not get a say in what the strategy really is.

And we have heard a lot about sort of flipping—you know, USAID is beginning to move in this direction where they've—you know, rather than giving—basically, the tradition has been, and I think they've been mandated to do it for some time, you know, fund international U.S. American organizations to go forth and maybe then find African partners to support implementing.

There are—like in Malawi, this organization CRECCOM, which is a community-based organization nationally across the country, is now getting direct funding and helping to design some girls education empowerment work, and it's highly, highly effective because they work with local tribal leaders to try to change gender norms, which really only they can do.

So I really think what we're hearing and what we have been doing with our partners trying to flip the narrative where international organizations who are—have lots of expertise, lots of things to offer, including universities that we have talked about, come in behind local organizations to try to give the—hear what they—what their ideas are for the solution and try to lend global expertise, including something we hear a lot about are sharing across borders.

That's a great thing for international groups to do. You know, what are my—you know, what are my peers in Africa doing or in Latin America, et cetera? And there's a—we have been doing a lot of exchange of innovative, scalable models that was mentioned before, some great, amazing strategies on expanding and scaling quality secondary education in the Amazon jungle, really useful for remote areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, for example.

So that—the U.S. Government is just taking baby steps in this direction, in my opinion, so I would encourage it to keep going and lean in even more.

Ms. JACOBS. Well, thank you. I want to move to Minister Sengeh.

You know, I appreciated that you talked about the Digital Public Goods platform. I actually helped work on that when I worked at UNICEF and as the CEO of Project Connect, which is now part of the Giga Project, which I know you all in Sierra Leone are working on as well.

But, you know, I wanted to ask you about how we can think about what we should be teaching these kids. You know, many schools in Africa still focus on the sort of old colonial rote memorization model.

So it's not enough just to get bodies into schools but make sure we're teaching them the right thing. And even when we're doing the more sort of tech focus, it's often just teaching a specific coding language that, frankly, will be obsolete by the time they graduate and go into the work force.

So how are you thinking about what skills these kids really need and how can we do more to invest in these kinds of education practices?

Mr. SENGEH. That's an excellent question and I think this is also linked to, again, back to the president's vision and human capital development.

In Sierra Leone, one of the things we have done, and this is much more difficult to do in other countries, it's changing the curriculum whole frame, so being able to change the civics curriculum, being able to change the basic education in the early childhood development and the secondary school curriculum.

We have what we call the five C's: critical thinking, creativity, civics; computational thinking, and comprehension. If you're teaching computational thinking, then you are not teaching coding, which is one language. You're helping the child learn how to think.

If you're thinking comprehension, you're going beyond literacy. Certainly, the child needs to be literate, but it's about whether they understand.

And the value of education—what we teach them is that they should be problem solvers and they should be creative and that they should participate in civic life. So for us in Sierra Leone it's these five C's that we go with and we're thinking beyond just what literacy and numeracy means.

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you.

And, Madam Vice Chair, I yield back.

Ms. OMAR. Thank you. I now recognize Mr. Meuser for 5 minutes.

Mr. MEUSER. Thank you, Madam Chair. Appreciate it. Thank you to Ranking Member Smith as well. So a very important subject. Glad to be a part of it.

Africa's demographics alone, certainly, underscore the need to make impactful investments in African education now. The data shows that in the next 30 years the working population in Sub-Saharan Africa will—is expected to double, accounting for two-thirds of the world's total population growth, and Africa's development depends on this predominantly young and growing population to be as practically educated and scientifically educated, I guess we could say, as possible.

So, Mr. Kaufman, I'll start with you. Thanks for being here. You mentioned that your school has developed a curriculum in coordination with local private sector employers. Certainly, that's done in the U.S. as well.

Love to hear a little bit more of your creativity and synergies that you create on how Abaarso tailors the curriculum in training students to ensure students are prepared for jobs, entrepreneurship, and, of course, future higher education.

So if you if you would, Mr. Kaufman, maybe elaborate some.

Mr. KAUFMAN. Yes, thank you. I so appreciate you coming back to the Abaarso Network on that. To begin with, our students who go to the Abaarso School—the secondary school—the key to making sure they're prepared for a changing, dynamic, and competitive global world and in order to come back to Somaliland and make a difference, we have to keep the standards as high as we would for anyone else around the world.

We can say, well, we're in a difficult place. We're in Sub-Saharan Africa. I'm so glad that more kids are going to school and that they're reading at a higher level.

We need to keep the standard at proficiency and readiness to compete on the world stage, and our graduates from the Abaarso School are doing just that and they're coming back and starting businesses, working for various ministries.

The other part of that is the liaison that we have with the university and our own network. So the 15 women who graduated and are now working in our primary schools, we have been watching and monitoring this year, well, how are they doing?

Are they good teachers? Are they reliable professionals? And the early returns have been fantastic. They are some of our best and most dedicated teaching staff, and we fully expect that some of them will go on to lead additional schools.

But we need to greatly expand our throughput on graduates from the university because unless there are more great teachers available, we can only expand as quickly as we can grow great teachers, or other partners can.

You asked about our creativity. So when I went around and spoke with CEOs from around the country and asked them, who are you going to be hiring for—what do you need, as one quick example, the director of the bottling plant that owns the Coke franchise in Somaliland said, well, they need quality assessors—people who are expert in planning and processes.

So we said, well, give us your forms, give us your tools, and we'll make that part of our curriculum in our school of management. We do not need to create a program in the abstract or that's theoretical. It can be specifically for their program or for their work force.

Mr. MEUSER. Well, you know what? You're really doing some great work. Congratulations, really, to all of you. It's so important.

Do you do—do you offer semesters abroad and any sort of student exchange?

Mr. KAUFMAN. We send some of our students. They get scholarships to go to secondary schools in the United States. But we also are very happy to receive students and young professionals who want to take a gap year or having a program to support and teach or learn teaching in our schools.

We provide about three to 4 weeks of professional development before the school year starts with everybody in country. So if we have got really smart, super dedicated young people, we're ready to help them make a difference in our classrooms.

Mr. MEUSER. Yes. Well, you know what? Let us know on the semesters abroad opportunities. Maybe we can be helpful within our districts or within our State. But really, really, congratulations for your enthusiasm and the important work that all of you are doing.

And I yield back, Madam Chair.

Ms. OMAR. Thank you. I think that concludes our first round of questions. I have some followup for a second round. If any member has or wants to do that as well please flag it for me.

I just wanted to begin with Mr. Kaufman. Earlier, you said that there was more the United States could do. Can you give us maybe two or three examples of ways the United States could be more helpful in regards to investment in education?

Mr. KAUFMAN. Yes. Thank you. The U.S., I think, can mobilize some of its partners of which it is a major shareholder, from dif-

ferent multilateral banks and government partners, to make sure
that they're providing support to the most proven models that are
scalable.

I've worked in the nonprofit and humanitarian community for a
long time and I know that a lot of inertia can buildup within that
community, and sometimes we struggle to make creative use of
those finances and they keep going to the same people for the same
things to little effect.

So I think the U.S. Government can really incentivize and influ-
ence how those dollars are spent so that more money can go to
things that work and that it be scaled.

Ms. OMAR. Thank you.

And, Dr. Winthrop, I wanted to ask you about USAID's distribu-
tion of textbooks and other school materials, especially in the con-
text of the shift to locally driven programming that you talked
about.

How does USAID ensure that these materials are student cen-
tered, meaning available in local languages and are covering appro-
priate subjects, and how will USAID's localization strategy affect
the provisions of these materials?

Dr. WINTHROP. That's a good question, and I'm not sure I have
the full answer because I do not think I have a super great grasp
on exactly what they're doing in textbook and materials distribu-
tion.

But what I can tell you from what I do know from my experience
is that, you know, while there is a general strategy in USAID, ev-
erything is run through the country office.

So, you know, mother tongue instruction is definitely high on the
list and it is one of the most effective ways of ensuring young peo-
ple can learn to read because, often, children are being asked to
come to school and learn in a language that they do not even know
how to read, and I know USAID is very much on top of that and
they are focused on mother tongue instruction in multiple lan-
guages.

I wonder if you're also getting at this question of if you were to
support local African groups and bringing the international com-
munity behind them, you know, what might be some of the new
strategies that USAID should take?

And, to me, I think, you know, folks that—partners that we work
with on the ground, the things that they ask for are often very
technical, like, come tell us the latest evidence on—from the learn-
ing sciences and how we can apply it, and less about how to imple-
ment rollout and understanding the contextual nuance of a coun-
try.

I do think that USAID could be very helpful in coming behind
folks on the ground, who often have more creative ideas of how the
different assets in their communities can be put together to really
accelerate change and not—that is, I think, the single biggest shift
that would really be helpful because often the U.S. Government
comes in with a solution—you're going to do this, et cetera.

Ms. OMAR. Thank you.

And, Ms. Sherif, I was very interested in your point about
COVID teaching us a valuable lesson in how to provide education
in extremely difficult circumstances. What are some of the COVID-

related programs that were used—that could be in use for other situations?

Ms. SHERIF. Yes, I think how we respond to COVID–19 depends on the context, and when we speak about Africa, we have the poorest infrastructure there to use technology because we often speak about the need of technology, and that works in countries like Lebanon where you have an infrastructure.

But when you go to countries like Mali, Central Africa Republic, they do not have infrastructure even for wifi. So to shift, I would say, also, our resources to ensure this campus can build an infrastructure that allows for technology to respond to remote learning is going to be very, very important.

You know, you have to flesh out a little bit of the resource distribution on the globe, to be honest, because you go into a place—and I've been to camps and IDP camps in places like Mali or Burkina Faso.

I mean, they do not even have—they do not even have electricity. So now how do you install wifi? How do you move on to technological solutions?

We're dealing with very, very primordial situations where there is nothing available. So not always look at technology as the only answer.

Ms. OMAR. Thank you.

Ms. SHERIF. That's No. 1. One more thing I would like to say— what is going to be very important and you see a very strong U.S. leadership here, and the U.S. has two big interests in the kind of Administration especially—a strong United Nations and strong delivery in the education sector.

Now, as a U.N. fund, we are a living example of how we can cap bureaucracy and show for more accountability, and when we delivered in COVID–19, the moment the pandemic was declared we actually picked up Martin Luther King's quote, the fears are larger now and we moved faster than most in delivering a response.

So I would say more funding and trust that our entrepreneurship and our less bureaucracy actually deliver results on the ground, bringing all actors together and in the competition and deliver real results.

Ms. OMAR. I see that we are out of time.

I do not see any other members who want to ask questions. And before I adjourn, I wanted to see if you all can do 1 minute of closing remarks and we will start with Minister Sengeh.

Mr. SENGEH. Thank you very much. I mean, I do think, as I said, our most powerful weapon is not a silver bullet to solving the world's intractable problems is public education.

Quality public education is our only way of ensuring that we achieve inclusion, we are better prepared to face pandemics of the future, and that we can help our children learn what they need to learn to fulfill their human potential, to participate in the global economy, and also to have great civic life, and that's what we have to do is support quality public education everywhere.

Thank you.

Ms. OMAR. Thank you. Mr. Kaufman?

Mr. KAUFMAN. Thank you. Yes.

First, I want to respond really quickly to Ms. Jacobs' question about what should we teach in class. I talked a lot about the relationship between the private sector and schools, and there's a great study that I've been carrying around for 7 years with—from McKinsey that noted that while there's 800 million unemployed youth, the vast majority of private sector companies or at least close to 50 percent of them say that they cannot find people—young people—who are qualified for entry level jobs. That disconnect is devastating and driving youth unemployment.

So one of my big takeaways is continue to recognize that schools are more than just buildings. We need to make them part of communities, part of a dynamic economic system and infrastructure, and then we have to incentivize and generate demand and ensure good quality.

Invest in the programs that have evidence of success, whether it's Abaarso or anyone else.

Thank you.

Ms. OMAR. Dr. Winthrop?

Dr. WINTHROP. Well, I would just second both what Minister Sengeh and Mr. Kaufman said. I think those are great.

I agree with all of it, and I think the final thing I would urge the committee to think about is, you know, there are lots of good examples—someone asked about scalable examples of what works—that are out there from different parts of the world that could—both within Sub-Saharan Africa but from outside Sub-Saharan Africa that could really be applied to effectively accelerate the pace of change and much more quickly close these big inequality gaps, part of which Mr. Kaufman referenced.

And, to me, this idea of leapfrogging at the core is to really think creatively about how to bring, whether it's employers to bear, technology companies to bear, communities to bear, all in this effort of educating kids.

We have seen really effective models of that being done, and I agree that the opening the mind and then investing in scaling is the best way to get the job done.

Ms. OMAR. Thank you.

Ms. Sherif?

Ms. SHERIF. Thank you very much.

Well, I would like to just lift up one incredible program where USAID has really played an instrumental role, and that is the first ever Refugee Education Response Plan in Uganda when you had refugees coming from South Sudan.

And the USAID played an instrumental role in making it one of the successful investments of Education Cannot Wait and that has continued throughout the Sahel and other countries.

You have incredibly strong USAID officers on the ground. They are there to determine strategic focus, moving and shaking everyone else to work together, and I think that besides the strategic contribution—the Uganda Refugee Response Plan is a great example in time—is financing and bring in the private sector.

Private sector, together with governmental resources, can make that difference. It's not impossible. Strong people, financing, private sector, and we can turn the tide around.

Nothing is impossible. We can do it.

Ms. OMAR. I just want to thank all of our panelists and our colleagues for participating in this wonderful discussion today.

I want to thank Chairwoman Karen Bass and Ranking Member Smith. And, you know, my father used to say education is the greatest equalizer, and if we want to create a more equitable world we have to make sure that we're investing in the education and the well-being of every child in every corner of the world.

So thank you all. This meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:27 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights

Karen Bass (D-CA), Chair

REVISED

February 2, 2022

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights virtually via Cisco WebEx. The hearing will be available by live webcast on the Committee website at https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/:

DATE: Tuesday, February 8, 2022

TIME: 10:00 a.m., EST

SUBJECT: Improving Access to Quality Public Education in Africa

WITNESSES: The Honorable David Sengeh
                 Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
                 Office of the President, Sierra Leone

                 Rebecca Winthrop, Ph.D.
                 Senior Fellow and Co-Director
                 Center for Universal Education
                 The Brookings Institution

                 Ms. Yasmine Sherif
                 Director
                 Education Cannot Wait

*   Mr. Robert Kaufman
                 Executive Director
                 Abaarso Network

*NOTE: Witness has been added.
**NOTE: Further witnesses may be added.

By Direction of the Chair

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON _Africa, Global Health, Global Human_ HEARING _Rights_

Day _Tuesday_ Date _02/08/22_ Room _Virtual/webex_

Starting Time _10:02am_ Ending Time _11:30a_

Recesses [ ] (___to___) (___to___) (___to___) (___to___) (___to___) (___to___)

Presiding Member(s) _Rep Karen Bass; Rep Ilhan Omar_

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☑
Executive (closed) Session ☐
Televised ☐

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☑
Stenographic Record ☑

TITLE OF HEARING:

Improving Access to Quality Public Education in Africa

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See attendance Sheet

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: _(Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)_

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: _(List any statements submitted for the record.)_

QFR - Young Kim

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED _11:30a_

Subcommittee Staff Associate

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH, AND GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS

COMMITTEE HEARING

FEBRUARY 08, 2022

PRESENT	MEMBER
✓	Karen Bass, CA
✓	Dean Phillips, MN
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✓	Ami Bera, CA
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✓	Dan Meuser, PA
	Young Kim, CA
	Rony Jackson, TX

OPENING STATEMENT FROM CHAIRMAN BASS

<u>Rep. Bass Remarks</u>
<u>Virtual Hearing</u>
<u>"Improving Access to Quality Public Education in Africa"</u>
<u>Tuesday, February 8, 2022 @ 10:00am EST</u>

Chair (countdown): Five, four, three, two, one.

[Pause for three seconds, bang gavel]

Chair: The Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights

will come to order. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess

of the Subcommittee at any point, and all members will have five days to submit

statements, extraneous material, and questions for the record, subject to the length

limitation in the rules. To insert something into the record, please have your staff

email the previously mentioned address or contact full committee staff.

As a reminder to Members, please keep your video function on at all times, even

when you are not recognized by the Chair. Members are responsible for muting

and unmuting themselves, and please remember to mute yourself after you finish

speaking. Consistent with the H.Res. 965 and the accompanying regulations, staff

will only mute members and witnesses as appropriate when they are not under

recognition to eliminate background noise.

I see that we have a quorum and will now recognize myself for opening remarks.

Pursuant to notice, we are holding a hearing on *Improving Access to Quality Public Education in Africa* to discuss the ways in which the United States can help enhance the delivery of quality of education on the continent.

To lead that conversation, I want to thank our witnesses for being here today – The Honorable David Sengeh, Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education for the Office of the President in Sierra Leone; Dr. Rebecca Winthrop, Senior Fellow and Co-Director for The Brookings Institution in the Center for Universal Education; Ms. Yasmine Sherif, Director of Education Cannot Wait; and Mr. Robert Kaufman, Executive Director of Abaarso Network. I welcome your testimony and the discussion surrounding it.

I look forward to hearing our experts describe the various ways in which the U.S. can assist in overcoming the challenges some African countries face with basic education systems and what we can do to increase access to quality schooling, be it public or private.

Across the continent to varying degrees, the pre-primary, primary, middle, and
secondary education systems, what we in the U.S. would generally refer to as pre-
Kindergarten to 12 grade or basic education, require support. The African Union's
Continental Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 reports progress in expanding access to
primary education across Africa from 59% to 79% between 1999 and 2012.
However, these gains could be increased should there be greater policy emphasis
and investment in target areas such as pre-primary education, educating girls and
children with disabilities, increasing funding for infrastructure and educators.
These types of strategies are important and must be specific to local contexts, but
the fundamental goal remains the same, get all children to school early, develop
solutions to coherently link the stages of basic education to ensure they acquire a
strong foundation without interruption.   It's disheartening to hear that by the time
children reach primary school age, an estimated 34 million of them go unenrolled.
The trend continues and is even greater for middle and secondary school-aged
children respectively. In many countries, disparities in access to education stem
from differences in gender, regional location, or socio-economic status. The
COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges through the closure
of schools, pushing hundreds of millions of students out of school since the
beginning of the pandemic.

I feel it is important for us to do more to create policy and investment opportunities on the continent to improve access to education. ==This Congress, I plan on introducing a bill that focuses on promoting access to inclusive, uninterrupted quality pre-primary and secondary education in Africa **(or reauthorizing the READ Act of 2017)**.== I want to prioritize the importance of education at a young age that goes uninterrupted because these children will grow to contribute to the expanding and growing economy on the continent – which will in turn strengthen the continent's capacity for self-reliance.

In recent discussions with USAID education experts, I have learned that under the auspices of the Reinforcing Education Accountability Act in Development (READ Act), the United States seeks to work within local context to improve quality and expand access to education across the continent. Beyond its traditional engagement, USAID is expanding outreach to include non-state education providers through new financing approaches. Again, the goal is to improve the quality of education and to reach more children as early as possible. These fresh ideas are needed and must be realized to meet the mutually beneficial goals of the United States and Africa.

Further, the continent also has the biggest untapped market of young consumers in the world, and it must be a priority for U.S. national security interests to educate them on the importance of democratic principles and free market economies. Young people must be taught to believe in the rule of law, free speech, freedom of the press, and assembly, and have the hope of real prospects of employment that these ideals provide and protect. We should be encouraged by the expansion and growth of trade and investments on the continent through programs such as Prosper Africa, whose purpose is to substantially increase the two-way U.S.-African trade and investment; but, a well-educated populace is required for these and other initiatives to be successful.

Finally, children who have access to quality education go on to partake in opportunities for young professionals through programs such as the Young African Leaders Initiative, which includes the Mandela Washington Fellowship. I introduced and passed in the House, **HR 965 *the YALI Act,*** to strengthen young leaders' knowledge and skills at U.S. institutions, have them connect with other Africans from different countries in Africa, and ensure they can harness their skills. The skills of young leaders begin at the pre-primary and secondary school age, when foundations are built. We must invest in these children today so that they become the young leaders of tomorrow.

I now recognize the Ranking Member for the purpose of making his opening

statement.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

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MEMORANDUM   February 1, 2022

To: House Foreign Affairs Committee, Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights
               Subcommittee
                 Attention: Tomekah Burl

From: Nicolas Cook, Specialist in African Affairs, ncook@crs.loc.gov, 7-0429
               Emily M. Morgenstern, Analyst in Foreign Assistance and Foreign Policy,
               emorgenstern@crs.loc.gov, 7-0213

Subject: **U.S. and Other International Support for Education in Africa**

As requested, this memorandum provides information in support of a hearing on how the United States
can help enhance the delivery of quality primary and secondary education in Africa, in advance of
possible legislation and a prospective U.S. policy strategy on these matters. Material of general interest to
Congress herein may be used in other CRS products, but the confidentiality of your request is assured.

Education in Africa: Challenges and Options

International development experts have conducted considerable research on education progress and
challenges in Africa, and numerous entities work to improve educational systems in Africa (generally a
reference herein to the whole continent, unless otherwise specified). Much of this research and assistance
focuses on developments in individual African countries; there are comparatively fewer region-centered
efforts. One region-wide assessment—and one reflecting the integrated views and priorities of all African
governments—is the African Union (AU) *Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016 – 2025* (CESA,
adopted in 2015). CESA provides a frank assessment of the state of basic education—often defined as
comprising pre-primary through middle school education, but in some contexts also includes secondary
education—and related challenges in Africa. It also sets out a range of education policy objectives and
recommendations for African policymakers aimed at addressing these challenges. The analysis and policy
options in CESA dovetail closely with more detailed and topic-specific assessments set out in the general
educational literature and by multilateral actors, such as the World Bank and UNICEF.[1] As discussed
below, they also align closely with the basic education elements of the United Nations (U.N.) Sustainable

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[1] See, for instance, Paul Bennell, "The political economy of attaining Universal Primary Education in sub-Saharan Africa: The
politics of UPE implementation," *International Journal of Educational Development* (80), January 2021, and Idowu Biao,
"Supplying Basic Education and Learning to Sub-Saharan Africa in the Twenty-First Century," *World Journal of Education*
(8:2), 2018, among others. Numerous additional studies assess basic education quality, expansion, and related issues in individual
countries. Recent examples of relevant multilateral agency work include Bashir, et al., *Facing Forward: Schooling for Learning
in Africa*, World Bank, 2018, which complements a large body of prior World Bank research; and UNICEF, *Transforming
Education in Africa: An Evidence-Based Overview and Recommendations for Long-Term Improvements*, September 2021.

Development Goals (SDGs), a set of key global development targets, and past U.N. efforts to aid basic education system capacity-building in the developing world.

In CESA, the AU reports that pre-primary education across Africa, with some exceptions, is frequently "a neglected area in terms of policy and investment... characterized by disparities, poor management and lack of coherent curriculum and linkages with primary education."[2] It notes that the average pre-primary enrollment rate across sub-Saharan Africa—20% at the time CESA was published, and growing to 28% as of 2020 (most recent data)—is far below averages in other world regions. (The world region with the next lowest pre-primary enrollment rate in 2020 was the Middle East and North Africa, as defined by the World Bank), at 32%, while the next lowest was South Asia, at 62%.)[3] CESA also asserts that public sector pre-primary infrastructure, teacher development, and access to learning materials are inadequate, and that local language instruction is often unavailable, leaving many pupils unprepared for their transition to primary education.

With respect to primary education, CESA contends that in recent decades, "Africa has made tremendous progress in expanding access to primary education," as the region's adjusted net enrollment ratio jumped from 59% to 79% between 1999 and 2012, according to CESA.[4] Since that time, such enrollment has remained relatively flat, and stood at 78% in 2018 (latest estimate)[5]—though there is considerable variation among countries in moving toward universal primary education[6]—meaning that a large number of African children remain out of school. UNICEF, citing UNESCO data, reports that in 2019, of all primary-, middle-, and secondary school-aged children, 34 million (17%), 30 million (33%), and 41 million (53%), respectively, were out of school. This population—the absolute size of which has gradually grown over the past two decades due to population growth, even while decreasing moderately relative to the overall population—comprised 41% of the global population of non-enrolled children.[7]

CESA also found that in many countries, there are large subnational disparities in access to basic education on the basis of gender, regional location, and minority or socio-economic group status (e.g., access rates were often low among migratory pastoralist, poor, and other marginalized communities). It also found that primary education learning attainment and completion rates are very low in many countries. As of 2020, primary school completion rates averaged 70% across sub-Saharan Africa, the same as reported in CESA in 2015. As with many education metrics, however, recent completion rate data

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[2] Pre-primary education is designed to meet the educational and developmental needs of children between the ages of three through kindergarten and prepare them for primary school. The AU strategy also speaks to the need for quality early childhood education, i.e., programs of formative development for children below the age of three. AU, *Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 Indicators Manual*, n.d.; and UNESCO, *International Standard Classification of Education 2011*, 2012.

[3] World Bank, "School enrollment, preprimary (% gross) - Sub-Saharan Africa" and analogous entries for other world regions in *World Development Indicators* database (WDI hereafter).

[4] Primary education refers to initial systematic study centering on foundational reading, writing and, mathematics skill-building. AU, CESA *Indicators Manual*, op. cit.; and UNESCO, *International Standard Classification*, op cit.

[5] Adjusted net enrollment (ANE) reflects the share of students of the normative age range for a given educational level who are enrolled; in contrast, gross enrollment, which is far higher for many African countries, includes learners of all ages enrolled at a learning level, including remedial or belated older youth and adult learners. While the primary education ANE estimate for sub-Saharan Africa stood at 78% in 2018, that estimate is based on very dated data for some countries (e.g., 2009 for Malawi and 2010 for Nigeria, Africa's most populous country). For 28 countries reporting 2017 or 2018 ANE data, average enrollment stood at nearly 84% in 2018. WDI, "Adjusted net enrollment rate, primary (% of primary school age children) - Sub-Saharan Africa."

[6] Bashir, et al., divide countries in the region into a four-group typology ("established," "emerged," "emerging," and "delayed") defining their relative progress toward instituting universal primary education access. See "Figure 1.3, Growth in Access to Primary Education in 45 Sub-Saharan African Countries, by Group, 2000–13," in Bashir, et al., *Facing Forward*, op cit.

[7] UNICEF, *Transforming Education*, op cit.

was outdated or unavailable for many countries; for 26 countries reporting 2019 or 2020 data, the average was 77%.[8]

CESA attributes such deficits to "poor quality of teaching, facilities and dire lack of learning materials," as well as persistent "ineffective" leadership, school management, and quality assurance. According to CESA, many of the same challenges characterize middle and secondary education, though enrollment, completion, and educational attainment rates are even lower for these levels, and attrition rates for girls even higher. Such findings track closely with other assessments from other sources.[9] CESA identifies as an overall key challenge the need "to sustain [universal basic education] access while improving learning outcomes" and "relevant competencies and knowledge" for existing students, while also enrolling the significant number of children who are not in school. Policy proposals set out in CESA include prioritizing a focus on "the teaching force, its training, deployment, professional development as well as working and living conditions" and increasing teacher accountability (e.g., for performance), while also gradually increasing the number of school years that define a basic education. CESA also calls for improving school infrastructure, notably "in hard-to-reach and marginalized areas"; providing universal access to quality learning materials; strengthening school feeding and health programs; and increasing the retention of girl pupils and boosting female academic performance, notably in mathematics and science.

CESA envisions ICT as providing a key channel for helping to meet many of these challenges—though a range of ICT capacity gaps in many countries (e.g., lack of access to electricity, digital network access, and digital equipment) pose significant barriers in many countries or sub-national regions. With respect to secondary school, the strategy calls for many of the same improvements as it outlines as necessary at lower grade levels, as well as closer linkages between secondary education outcomes and their application to employability, technical and vocational training, and potential student advancement to higher education, notably with respect to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. The need for

> **Education and the COVID-19 Pandemic**
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> The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which began after CESA was issued, has had wide-ranging negative impacts on access to basic education across Africa, notably in sub-Saharan Africa. School closures in many countries led learners to shift to distance learning or lose access to school entirely. A proportion of those out of school as a result of the pandemic are not expected to ever return to the classroom, with substantially negative impacts on their income earning potential.[10] School closures also have reduced access to school feeding programs and exposed some out-of-school children, notably girls, to heightened risks of sexual abuse and domestic violence, as well as reduced adolescent access to family planning services.[11] At the same time, in some countries, COVID-19 has driven new investment in remote learning information and communications technology (ICT) that may help improve educational access and quality in the long-term.

enhanced data gathering and application in planning and continuous evaluation processes also are noted. CESA lays out a series of additional issue-specific objectives and actions to meet the challenges set out above, as well as impediments and prescriptions relating to policy reform communication and advocacy;

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[8] WDI, "Primary completion rate, total (% of relevant age group) - Sub-Saharan Africa."

[9] Bashir, et al. (*Facing Forward...*, op cit.) report that basic education learning levels remain "perilously low by international standards" in many African countries, jeopardizing students' ability to attain a basic literacy and numeracy or progress to secondary school and beyond, ultimately compromising the region's knowledge and skilled human labor capital. See also UNICEF, *Transforming Education in Africa*, op cit.

[10] UNICEF, *COVID-19: Students face $17 trillion loss in lifetime earnings*, December 6, 2021.

[11] See, e.g., Hai-Anh H. Dang, et al., *Impact of COVID-19 on Learning: Evidence from Six Sub-Saharan African Countries*, World Bank, May 2021; U.N. Women East/Southern Africa, *COVID-19: Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Key Priorities and Interventions for Effective Response and Recovery*, 2022; Siphokazi Kwatubana and Vivian Thuso Molaodi, "Ensuring the Continuation of School Feeding Programmes during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case of 'New Normal'" in *New Challenges to Education: Lessons from Around the World*, BCES Conference Books (19), 2021; and World Bank, *Education COVID-19 School Closures Map*, https://tinyurl.com/25vf7kk6 [Note: Short URL; redirects to World Bank website].

educational sector governance; implementation and monitoring of reforms and capacity-building; and funding needs.

International Efforts to Enhance Education in Africa

African efforts to ensure access to quality education in the region are aided by an array of international efforts to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of 17 objectives for achieving a range of core socioeconomic and human security and welfare improvements globally by 2030, as set out by the U.N. General Assembly (UNGA).

SDG 4 seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."[12] With respect to basic education, SDG 4 seeks to ensure gender-equitable access to quality early childhood development and pre-primary education programs and to free quality primary and secondary education to ensure "relevant and effective learning outcomes." Related goals are to: "achieve literacy and numeracy" for all youth and a substantial proportion of adults; and to "eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education for all populations" (e.g., persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations).[13] Two core SDG 4 objectives related to basic education are to "build and upgrade" and otherwise ensure effective learning environments and to "substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries."[14]

SDG 4 builds upon earlier multilateral organization-led international efforts centered on education, notably an education target under the Millennium Development Goals (an SDG forerunner), the 1990-2015 U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)-led Education for All education support initiative, and related U.N. agency actions (e.g., the U.N. Decade of Education for Sustainable Development [2005-2014]).[15] International endorsement of SDG 4 was spearheaded by the adoption of the *Education 2030 Incheon Declaration* in May 2015 by participants—including the United States—at a summit of the World Education Forum (WEF), a UNESCO-coordinated grouping of government ministers from over 100 countries, multilateral agency officials, and non-governmental stakeholders involved in education.

The declaration, a framing vision for shared international support of a range of key SDG 4 and related education support efforts between 2015 and 2030, also sets out tools, mechanisms, and political aspirations for achieving these goals. It charges UNESCO with leading global coordination of efforts to achieve the Declaration's goals, in partnership with WEF member countries, multilateral agencies, and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), a donor-financed education support financing platform that seeks to strengthen developing country education systems.[16] In late 2015, 184 UNESCO member states, including the United States, adopted the *SDG4 Education 2030 Framework for Action*, a global,

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[12] See UNGA, "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," A/RES/70/1 (2015).

[13] SDG 4 includes additional goals centering on higher education, vocational and other job training, and broad support for all learners. U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "Sustainable Development Goal 4 and Its Targets."

[14] Ibid.

[15] See CRS In Focus IF10249, *The Post-2015 Global Development Agenda*, by Marian L. Lawson; UNESCO, *Education For All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges*, 2015; and UNESCO, "UN Decade of ESD," and "What is Education for Sustainable Development?" (online materials, n.d.).

[16] GPE promotes policy dialogue on international education capacity-building priorities by convening diverse groups of public and private sector stakeholders (e.g., donors, multilateral agencies, civil society groups, and teacher representatives); works to align, monitor, and adapt international support for education in the developing countries; and funds efforts to support reforms, action plans, and other activities in individual beneficiary countries. GPE initiated project funding in 2004. The United States is GPE's seventh-largest cumulative donor. GEP and its activities are described online at https://globalpartnership.org.

comprehensive SDG 4 implementation plan that aligns closely with the AU *Continental Education Strategy for Africa*.[17]

U.S. Assistance for Education in Africa

Education has long been a key sectoral target of U.S. foreign assistance programs, with demonstrated interest by successive Congresses and Administrations. U.S. education assistance has historically focused primarily on basic education improvements, although programs targeting secondary and higher education, and broader learning challenges (e.g., agricultural, health, business training and goal-specific behavioral change efforts) also have been supported.[18] The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Peace Corps, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) administer the majority of U.S.-supported educational programs abroad, though multiple other U.S. government entities also contribute to international education efforts. This work varies widely in scope and focus. Key targets of assistance relating to basic education center on educational access, enrollment, and retention; curriculum development; teacher support; the development and distribution of textbooks and other learning materials; workforce development; education management and policy reform; and school construction.

Congress has authorized the majority of education assistance through the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (FAA, P.L. 87-195, as amended). More recently, both the Reinforcing Education Accountability in Development Act (READ Act, P.L. 115-56) and Global Child Thrive Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-283 P.L. 116-283, Div. A, Title XII) have amended the FAA and set policy for basic education and early childhood development, respectively. Members have also proposed legislation related to certain aspects of education assistance, including on global learning loss as a result of COVID-19 (H.R. 1500/S. 552), and girls' educational attainment (H.R. 4134/S. 2276), among other issues. No proposed measures related to education assistance in Africa have been enacted in the 117th Congress.

Congress also appropriates funding for both basic and higher education purposes—including higher education activities related to enhancing basic education, such as research and teacher training—in annual Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs (SFOPS) appropriations bills. For FY2021, Congress designated not less than $950 million for basic education, not less than $235 million for higher education, and not less than $50 million for higher education in countries "impacted by economic crises.".[19] Such allocations are generally global; most country-specific funding levels are set by the executive branch in consultation with Congress and not reported until the fiscal year is over. Congress periodically designates monies for education programs in specific countries in annual SFOPS appropriations bills (e.g., allocating up to $10 million for higher education programs in Malawi in FY2021 and several prior fiscal years).

The *U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education, Fiscal Years 2016-2023* guides the provision of basic education assistance, as required under the READ Act (P.L. 115-56).[20] The strategy sets out two principal priorities: (1) improving learning outcomes; and (2) expanding access to quality basic education for all. Individual agency strategies and policy statements also inform education programming; USAID's 2018 *Education Policy*, for instance, guides education programming at all levels, including higher education..[21]

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[17] UNESCO, *Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4*, May 21, 2015, *World Education Forum 2015 Final Report*, 2015, and *Continental Overview: Bridging CESA and SDG 4 in Africa*, Africa Regional Report, January 2021.
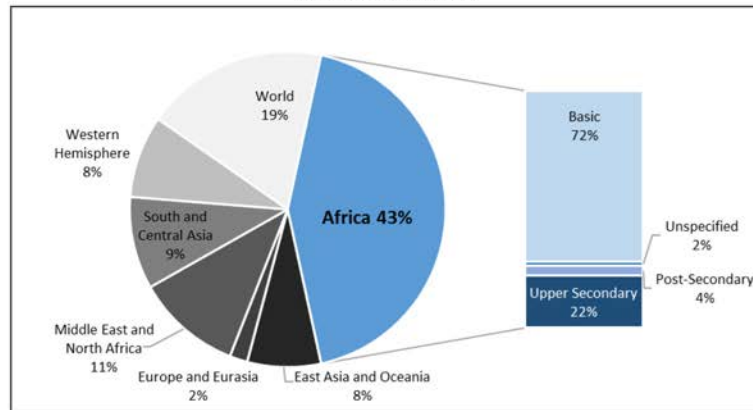
[18] CRS Report R44676, *Foreign Assistance and the Education Sector: Programs and Priorities*, by Emily M. Morgenstern.

[19] P.L. 116-260, Division K.

[20] U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education, FY 2019-2023, September 14, 2018, at https://go.usa.gov/xtUZU.

[21] USAID, USAID Education Policy, November 2018, p. 4, at https://www.usaid.gov/education/policy.

Figure 1. U.S. Education Assistance to Africa, FY2019
(Percentage of obligations)

Africa receives the highest share of U.S. education assistance funding (e.g., 43% in FY2019, the most recent year for which comprehensive global U.S. assistance data are available), as compared to other regions (**Figure 1**). Of those funds in FY2019, 72% were spent on basic education programs, 22% on upper secondary education, and the balance on tertiary or other education programs. While comprehensive data are not available for more recent fiscal years, USAID, which administers the largest share of U.S. education assistance, reports having provided $289 million to support basic education in sub-Saharan Africa in FY2020. This level includes both funding enacted by Congress in regular appropriations and COVID-19 supplemental spending. For FY2021, USAID reports having provided an estimated $267 million in basic education assistance for the region.[22] As with most U.S. assistance globally, support for education activities is allocated based on assessed need and country-specific U.S. assistance strategies.

Africa Education Initiative and Let Girls Learn: Two Key Prior U.S. Assistance Initiatives

Notable past U.S. focused basic education initiatives focused on sub-Saharan Africa include the President George W. Bush-initiated Africa Education Initiative (AEI) and Let Girls Learn, an Obama Administration initiative.

AEI. In July 2001, then-President Bush directed the State Department and USAID "to develop an initiative to improve basic education and teacher training in Africa."[23] That work informed President Bush's mid-2002 launch of AEI, initially a $200 million, five-year initiative, primarily implemented by USAID. It sought to:

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[22] Recent prior-year USAID funding for basic education in Africa included $325 million in FY2017; $304 million in FY2018; and $279 million in FY2019. USAID response to CRS inquiry, January 27, 2022; data for FY2021 is an initial estimate; all other data reflects actual expenditure levels.

[23] George W. Bush White House, "Remarks by the President to the World Bank," July 17, 2001, https://go.usa.gov/xt5Bd.

- Train more than 160,000 new teachers, provide in-service training for more than 260,000 existing teachers, and partner with U.S. historically black colleges and universities to provide 4.5 million more textbooks and other learning tools to students in Africa;
- Provide 250,000 scholarships for African girls under the Ambassadors Girls Scholarship Program (AGSP);
- Expand African parents' roles in their children's education by working to make school systems more transparent and open to reforms from parents; and
- Increase overall U.S. assistance for basic education in Africa to a total of $630 million over five years.[24]

In 2005, President Bush announced an additional $400 million, four-year commitment to AEI. Spanning 2006 through 2010, it set new goals, including efforts to train 500,000 teachers and administrators; provide 300,000 AGSP scholarships; develop and distribute 10 million textbooks and instructional materials; help build schools; and expand educational opportunities inside and outside the classroom. It also aimed to improve access to educational opportunities for marginalized students, teachers, out-of-school youth, and orphans and other vulnerable children, and expand access to job skills training.[25]

Let Girls Learn. In 2015, the Obama Administration announced Let Girls Learn, an inter-agency umbrella initiative to expand existing U.S. efforts to help adolescent girls attend and complete school. While global in scope, Let Girls Learn substantially focused on sub-Saharan Africa. U.S. implementing agencies included the Departments of State, Labor, and Agriculture, USAID, the Peace Corps, the MCC, and the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

The initiative supported Peace Corps-led community programs to identify barriers facing adolescent girls' ability to attend and stay in school, as well as national girls' education programs, mostly implemented by USAID and the MCC. It also included a range of girls' empowerment and leadership programs, often centered on promoting girls' participation in STEM fields, and associated diplomatic and policy advocacy and awareness campaigns. Other foci included girls' health, nutrition, and personal empowerment programs, notably under the Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, Safe (DREAMS) PEPFAR HIV/AIDS prevention initiative (which remains under way), and programs to address gender-based violence and prevent child, early, and forced marriage. It also supported U.S. partnerships with other bilateral, multilateral, and private sector actors, notably in support of U.N.-sponsored education initiatives.

In March 2016, the Obama Administration launched a related inter-agency *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* and several related agency-specific implementation plans. In October 2016, the Obama Administration—noting that Let Girls Learn had invested more than $1 billion to support programs in more than 50 countries—announced multiple new private sector commitments to support girls' education and in its FY2017 budget request proposed an additional $100 million to support the initiative.[26]

USAID has separately funded activities that have closely supported interventions to improve education called for by the African Union and multilateral stakeholders, as discussed above. Recent key past examples include Research for Effective Education Programming – Africa (REEP, 2016-2021) and the global, but substantially Africa-focused Education Data For Decision Making activity (EdData II, 2004-2015). REEP provided research aiding USAID education work on such matters as data collection in support of educational planning and decision-making; national early grade language of instruction policies; school-related gender-based violence prevalence; and teacher knowledge, skills, and views on literacy and language.[27] EdData II developed data sets and assessment and analysis tools and methods supporting educational quality measurement, with a focus on early grade assessments, school performance and management, and household education access. It also piloted early grade teaching interventions to address learning attainment deficits, disseminated assessment findings to local education

[24] George W. Bush White House, "Fact Sheet: Africa Education Initiative," June 20, 2002, https://go.usa.gov/xt5BG.

[25] George W. Bush White House, "Fact Sheet: Africa Education Initiative (AEI)," June 30, 2005, https://go.usa.gov/xt5Kk.

[26] Obama White House, "Fact Sheet: President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama Announce New Whole of Government Initiative, Let Girls Learn," March 3, 2015, "Fact Sheet: Let Girls Learn - A Comprehensive Investment in Adolescent Girls Education," October 11, 2016, and "Fact Sheet: New Commitments to Let Girls Learn Announced by First Lady Michelle Obama on International Day of the Girl," October 11, 2016.

[27] USAID, *Research for Effective Education Programming-Africa: Year Four Annual Workplan*, 2019, among others.

decisionmakers and stakeholders, and assessed the state of literacy and of effective teaching and education policies in sub-Saharan Africa.[28]

According to USAID, to address existing basic education challenges—building on the aforementioned efforts—as well as new ones attributable to COVID-19, education investments in sub-Saharan Africa:

> will continue to be used to support data-driven policy options including remedial and accelerated learning to catch up with progress lost, remote learning solutions, structured lesson plans, curriculum prioritization, and accelerated teaching programs, to name a few, that contribute to building an educational system that is more resilient to crisis, flexible in meeting student needs, and equitable in reaching the most under-represented children and youth in all contexts.[29]

Additional USAID efforts to ensure "equitable and inclusive access to quality education for all learners, including all genders" and historically marginalized students also are priorities. To attain these goals, USAID Africa Bureau education programs seek to:

- Promote inclusive education programs for children with disabilities, including through skill development and access to technology;
- Support policies and reforms to close the gender gaps in education and address issues related to child protection;
- Generate accurate and reliable regional and country-specific education data to support assessment of countries' educational needs, including other development actors' activities;
- Support efforts to expand student awareness of climate resilience and action, and build the evidence base around the need for student social and emotional well-being and resilience;
- Advocate for stronger teacher training programs and promote leadership and workforce development for older youth;
- Partner with USAID's Global Health Bureau to promote school health frameworks that respond to the secondary impacts of COVID-19 and strengthen joint work between national ministries of education and health to enhance infectious disease prevention and mitigation;
- Support ICT strategies to improve digital skills for learning, especially distance learning, including localized content on key cross-sectoral development issues; and
- Bolster the evidence base for scaling investment in family engagement in learning.[30]

Possible Questions

Addressing Key Challenges. What progress has been made and what key challenges persist with regard to achieving universal basic education in sub-Saharan Africa? To what extent are African basic education systems producing adequate levels of literacy and numeracy? Which countries have demonstrated the most success? What are the most promising strategies for improving the quality of teaching in the region?

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[28] USAID, *Education Data for Decision Making (EdData II): Key Achievements and Lessons Learned Final Report*, 2016, *Effective Teaching and Education Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Conceptual Study of Effective Teaching and Review of Educational Policies in 11 Sub-Saharan African Countries*, 2015, *Data for Education Research and Programming (DERP) in Africa Final Report*, 2016, and *State of Literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa Briefer*, 2016.

[29] USAID response to CRS inquiry, January 27, 2022.

[30] Ibid.; verbatim USAID language edited for clarity and brevity by CRS.

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Model Approaches. What scalable, replicable, and cost-beneficial best practice models can countries draw on to increase access to early education, ensure that expected educational outcomes are attained, and enhance the effectiveness of curricula design and school management? What are some examples of the most cost-effective and impactful investments that Africa's external development partners have made or could pursue to improve access to quality education in sub-Saharan Africa? What countries in Africa offer examples of best practices to promote quality education and graduation from, not merely enrollment in, primary and secondary schools?

Girls' Education. What are the most effective interventions to increase girls' access to and successful completion of basic and secondary education? What approaches are most likely to strengthen girls' STEM capabilities and their potential to advance to and complete secondary education? Please discuss the role of interventions—such as mentoring, gender-based and sexual violence prevention, and the availability of gender-separated sanitary facilities and menstrual hygiene support—in bolstering the retention and safety of African girls in basic education contexts.

U.S. Assistance for Education in Africa: Insights. Please discuss the thrust of USAID's work over the past decade in supporting enhanced educational quality, effective teaching, and other efforts to improve education outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa. What have been the main successes and challenges associated with that work? What are the main lessons learned from the implementation of the Africa Education Initiative (AEI), launched by President George W. Bush in 2001, and the Obama Administration's Let Girls Learn initiative? Do activities initiated under those programs continue?

U.S. Program Effectiveness. In general, how effective have U.S. education in Africa programs been? In what manner have the impacts of U.S. support for basic and secondary education in Africa been monitored, evaluated, and assessed? How are such findings integrated into follow-on program design?

Prospective U.S. Education Strategy for Africa. Please discuss what processes and stakeholder participation would be necessary to design an effective, appropriately targeted U.S. basic education assistance strategy specifically for Africa? What are the most impactful efforts to improve educational outcomes in Africa that the United States is well-placed to support? What key issues or elements would you see as critical to include in such a U.S. assistance strategy? Please discuss the potential roles of various U.S. agencies in formulating and implementing an integrated inter-agency process to support enhanced educational services delivery in Africa. What best practices or lessons learned from past U.S. support of this nature should define such activity?

Data Gaps. In many sub-Saharan African countries, there are large data gaps with respect to enrollment and a range of education quality metrics necessary for crafting effective policies and programs and assessing their relative impacts. What might be needed to address such gaps and bolster analytical use of data in order to effectively and consistently deliver high quality, effective education services? What approaches could U.S. policy makers support to support such ends at the country level? To what extent are implementers of U.S. education assistance programs collecting and analyzing data in such a way that specific program intended impacts and outcomes can be demonstrated to have been achieved?

COVID-19. Please discuss the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on access to basic education and education outcomes in Africa. How have responses to the pandemic, such as lockdowns, reshaped the provision of basic education in the region, and to what extent may such changes endure? What are likely to be the most effective approaches for ensuring that the millions of students who are no longer in school as a result of COVID-19-related school closures return to the classroom? If they do not return, what are likely to be the impacts on these students' work, income earning, and social mobility prospects? Are there lessons from the West African experience with Ebola that are applicable?

COVID-19: Impacts on Digital Learning. To what extent has the need to bolster access to remote learning in response to COVID-19 spurred new digital access and ICT investments and related best

practices? What lessons from such responses may help implementers to more effectively integrate ICT into education programs over the long-term?

Educational Reform Strategies. Please discuss the thrust of the educational improvement goals and strategies set out under Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) and the African Union's *Continental Education Strategy for Africa* 2016 – 2025 (CESA). What other key sources of recommendations on such issues should policy makers consult? Please discuss the *SDG4 – Education 2030 Framework for Action*, and its applied relationship to other education capacity-building initiatives in Africa.

Key Stakeholders. Please discuss the role of UNESCO in coordinating the work of the U.N. family of agencies and other stakeholders involved in implementing SDG 4, with particular reference to Africa. What is the role of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in implementing the *Education 2030 Framework*? How is GPE structured, how is it funded, and how does it allocate the funds it manages. What has been its chief successes and challenges? Please also discuss the makeup and role of the Education Commission and its Global Education Forum's work with regard to Africa.[31] What other key stakeholders are most involved in contributing to educational capacity-building in Africa?

Coordination of International Efforts. Please discuss the relative extent of and challenges associated with coordinating the many stakeholders—multilateral agencies and forums, African governments and their bilateral development partners, civil society, and the private sector—involved in aiding educational capacity-building and enhanced delivery in Africa. How is such coordination carried out? To what extent is there competition, program duplication, or stove-piping among development partners?

Program and Initiative Effectiveness. Why, after two decades of implementation of the UNESCO-led Education for All initiative and a host of other multilateral and national capacity-building programs, does Africa lag behind the rest of the world with respect to quality educational delivery and learning attainment? What are the main factors inhibiting the attainment of SD4 and the aims of the African Union's *Continental Education Strategy for Africa* (CESA)? How would you assess the relative impact as multi-year U.S. African education initiatives, such as Africa Education Initiative (AEI) and the Let Girls Learn?

Funding. Please discuss the relative adequacy—in absolute terms and with regard to the distribution of funds among countries and programs—of national and international funding to achieve the kinds of qualitative reforms set out under SDG 4 and the AU's CESA. What investments show the greatest return on investment? How, if at all, is funding coordinated among the many stakeholders and donors active in supporting education system improvements in Africa?

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[31] See The Education Commission, https://educationcommission.org/about/.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
AGH Hearing
"Improving Access to Quality Public Education"
Congresswoman Young Kim

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1. Barriers to Education for Adolescent Girls

Dr. Winthrop: What are some of the distinct barriers faced by adolescent girls in enrolling in and completing school? How would you assess the State Department and USAID's track record at addressing these challenges and what can we improve moving forward?

This is an important question because the barriers that have the biggest impact on girls' educational trajectories are also barriers that also hurt boys' trajectories. For example some of these include poorly trained teachers, pedagogical approaches that use route learning instead of more interactive methods that what we know from the learning sciences is a much better way for young people to learn, small percentage of school time used in actually teaching (note in Sierra Leone only 50% of the time teachers are actually teaching students because they are busy with other duties or absent), lack of quality teaching and learning materials, fees families have to pay for books, uniforms, taking exams that excludes poor children, etc. In other words, poor quality education services that are hard to access for poor people are the biggest hurdle to girls and boys education. Improving the quality of education and making it more accessible is a rising tide that will lift all boats, including girls.

However, that said there are particular barriers girls confront that especially emerge when they hit puberty and adolescents in certain parts of the world namely Sub-Saharan Africa and South-West Asia. In 2015 I did a study showing there were 80 "hotspot" countries, the vast majority of them in Sub-Saharan Africa where girls' are severely behind boys in educational achievement. Most of these countries are the poorest in the world and many were affected by crisis and conflict. In these contexts families with very restricted resources often have to make the hard choice on which child to educate because they literally cannot afford to educate all of them. Most frequently they make this choice based on social norms not necessarily who is most academically gifted. They can usually get resources from marrying girls' off or they could use girls' labor instead of hiring someone for household subsistence duties so girls are pulled out of school. In some contexts, but by no means all, girls' initiation ceremonies (e.g. moving from child to adult when they get their period) is followed by pregnancy and most often when girls get pregnant they do not continue school. Rarely is the barrier a lack of interest or desire on the part of parents to send their girls' to school.

I would like to note that in other parts of the world (e.g Caribbean and Latin America) that this phenomena runs the other way it is boys that are hard hit by barriers that lead them to drop out when they hit adolescence because they are expected to work and support the family.

In terms of how USAID and State are doing on the topic. I think the civil servants are quite sensitive to the issue and usually have a good sense of how to best support girls. During the Obama administration there were some good initiatives to advocate and support adolescent girls' but those seemed to have finished. Either way my recommendation is that the best way to help girls is to help improve the quality of education overall and that would include having the concept of gender equality mainstreamed throughout primary and secondary education both in terms of the curriculum and how teachers teach and how principals run the school (e.g. having textbooks show range of professions for women and not having girls sit at the back of class or not making female teachers only clean the school while male teachers do office work).

For more info on this topic please see my book: [What Works in Girls' Education: Evidence for the World's Best Investments](). There is a lot of good stuff in there (maybe more than you want but it is an easy skim reference and free PDF download).

2. People-To-People Exchanges

Dr. Winthrop: How effective are people-to-people exchanges between the U.S. and African countries in encouraging the growth of expertise that can contribute to better quality of education on the continent? How can educational exchange opportunities, especially those facilitated by the State Department, be maximized?

I think educational exchanges are wonderful, and I would include peace corps in there. But I would argue that they equally benefit people traveling from the US to Africa as Africans traveling to the US. For scholarships and supports for access to high school or higher ed in Africa what I have found is that most of the elite, well educated, leaders in Africa have had that opportunity. So I think it is great for building leaders but because the numbers are so tiny and so few people would have the ability to even access it, the strategy cannot be a major lever for educational change on the continent.

3. COVID-19 Impact on Education

Minister Sengeh: What impacts has the COVID-19 pandemic had on education enrollment rates in Africa and what changes it has had on the learning environment there? What steps have been taken to ensure students are back in school and able to catch up?

In the short term, the impact has been mainly on attendance and not on enrollment. In the initial phase of school closures, Sierra Leone switched to remote teaching including through radio. We invested – alongside our partners - in radios and radio transmitters to ensure that

all parts of the country were able to receive the education radio signal. In addition, we prioritized that those students sitting their transition exams were able to do so under safe conditions.

In the long term, the main risk is that students, especially girls, drop out of the education system entirely during extended periods of absence from the classroom. Often this is linked to teenage pregnancy, as we witnessed during the ebola pandemic.

To combat this, we have overturned the law that previously barred pregnant girls from attending school in Sierra Leone. In addition, we have adopted the radical inclusion policy to specifically focus on including four vulnerable groups of learners at risk of drop-out: girls, especially pregnant ones, disabled students, and students from remote or impoverished backgrounds. Only by deliberately focusing on the needs of these vulnerable learners can we prevent school closures from becoming mass drop-out events.

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