

Minister of Education, Liberia Address High Level Lunch
Education in Situations of Fragility: a Reality Check
By
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Education is the key path that enables all children to unlock the opportunity to success. It has been done for you and for me and yet many students have been caught in the situation where the entire education system and even the fabric of a society have been destroyed. In most of these instances, schools have been used to support military efforts and the children who should have been students have been used as soldiers. Schools have been the most important institutions to bring hope and a future to many children around the world. But there still remain too many places in the developing world where schools do not exist and there are insufficient means to establish them.

It is most difficult to re-establish schools and quality education when everything is destroyed: when teachers have been killed or taken as soldiers; when there are no educational materials and supplies; when parents are afraid to let go of their children and the children are afraid. It takes courage and commitment on everyone's part, and that is where leadership plays a major role.

Parents must be assured of their children's safety; children have to be encouraged to go to school – many of them for the first time at a much older age than expected. To put teachers in the classroom, you have to start with the best people available and make use of on-the-job training. The task of providing the classes with textbooks and learning materials must begin a new with thought as to the curriculum content, the language, and the distribution to ensure equity and peace building and not to re-introduce marginalization, division and conflict. Equity and

peace building can be compromised by a recovering country's inability to fully fund quality education for all of its youth. I would encourage the Board of GPE to increased support to education in fragile and post-conflict situations to help all children go to school, to learn, and to achieve. Reports show that, conflict-affected areas represent 50% of the out-of-school children worldwide. The GPE support will directly promote peace-building and conflict mitigation as well as economic and social recovery. I ask that the Board endorse this recommendation.

I also ask the GPE Board to support the Lucens Guidelines, which advocate that all parties in armed conflict must avoid infringements on students' safety and education, using the Guidelines as a standard for responsible practice. I want to re-assure you that because of my commitment to this all important issue in the education and safety of our youth, I contributed to the development of the Guidelines in Lucens, Switzerland in November of 2012, and am working on behalf of my government to serve as a champion.

I would consider all developing countries as being in some degree of emergency. The emergency will vary depending upon the country and upon certain locations within our countries. The nature of the emergency could be no schools, no educational materials and supplies, no teachers, no educational management and supervision, no data, no connectivity, no food. Each of these conditions, and especially when they exist in combination, represents an emergency for the affected youth and for their society and government that depend on their constructive participation. Whatever the emergency situation, it requires commitment, dedication, and support to unleash the opportunity which many children in the world take for granted. I must thank the GPE Board for its commitment and support to provide the opportunities for children all over the world and especially in developing countries where these are serious obstacles to human and national development. I also thank the

GPE for the understanding and flexibility it has demonstrated in meeting the need for emergency response strategies in post-conflict situations to be employed in combination with capacity building and financial support needed to successfully transition from recovery to development.

As world leaders, national and international donors, and multilateral organizations gather here in Brussels, we must all commit and support the GPE Fund Replenishment to provide education for every boy and girl. Remember, there will be just 500 more days remaining before the 2015 deadline to achieve universal primary education and to meet the Millennium Development Goal 2. This Goal cannot be reached if schools and universities continue to be used for military purposes during times of armed conflict or cannot be rebuilt after the cessation of conflict. We must ensure that schools remain a safe place for learning and growth and to give every girl and boy the opportunity to learn and grow, to gain marketable skills, and to have the opportunity to give back to their community, country and the world.

Funding only parts of the system that meet externally driven targets are seen by donors and recipients as necessary and welcome contributions but piecemeal rebuilding has the potential to create new inequalities and new conflict. It is now time to move away from doing business from your own individual mandates to more collaboration and coordination among donors and partners to ensure all children are in school, learning to read, write, count and acquire the skills necessary to become the citizens who make and keep the peace in a prosperous society.