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Strengthening integration, implementation and review – the HLPF after 2015

How can we ensure access to quality education through integrated national policies, cooperation and partnerships in the context of sustainable development and the post-2015 development agenda

Introduction

Thank you President (of the Economic and Social Council) Sajdik, for your kind and generous introduction.

I am honoured to be here with high-level representatives from UN agencies; Government; Civil Society; the private sector; other actors; ladies and gentlemen, one and all:

I am delighted to be part of this very timely event and historic moment for global sustainable development. I thank our host the High Level Political Forum for your warm welcome.

Since its creation, the United Nations has led the global struggle for human rights, dignity, freedom, and tolerance so that all human beings can reach their full potential. In more recent decades the UN began leading a different kind of effort to achieve more equitable and sustainable ways of living together on this planet.

As a result, a new era beckons us, one in which we have addressed the interconnected challenges of sustainable development. An era that can only be reached by working together. An era in which we live together in peace and security, on a planet we nurture. An era in which we realize opportunity for all.

It is a grand vision of our shared future. But put simply and bluntly, in an Australian way, we cannot get there without ensuring there is universal access to quality education.

The good news is we know that improving access to and the quality of education is possible. In the fifteen years that the Millennium Development Goals have galvanized the world we have seen the number of children not in primary school halve to 59 million. The number of children not enrolled in primary or lower secondary dropped by almost 40 percent to 124 million.

But the new Sustainable Development Goals will present a greater challenge.

To address it by pursuing business as usual will not be enough. Business as usual will mean we do not see the first cohort of sub-Saharan African girls to universally attend primary and lower secondary school until 2111.

I stand before you as the Chair of the Board of Directors of an organization, the Global Partnership for Education, which is determined to bust beyond business as usual and slash that one hundred year time horizon.

So determined that as a partnership we are driving ourselves through a rigorous process of improvement so that we maximize the resources going to the education of the poorest children and the impact of those dollars.

We entered 2015 having received from our developing country partners pledges of increased domestic financing to achieve quality basic education totaling $26 billion, with donors pledging $2.1 billion.

We also entered 2015 with a new funding model where 70% of available funding for a partner country is provided against evidence-based and financially sustainable education sector plans, drawn up in consultation with donors and other education stakeholders. 30% of the grant amount is allocated based on the achievement of specific results chosen by the government and development partners in the areas of learning quality, education system efficiency and equity for all children.

Our aim has always been to unlock the power of a genuine partnership, to build on the wealth of expertise and experience of our members, including UN agencies like UNICEF and UNESCO.

In addition, we are increasingly experienced and adept at resourcing and involving civil society in developing countries to contribute to education efforts and to hold all actors accountable for results.

Our core principle has always been country ownership of the vision for strengthening education systems. We support developing countries over a multi-year process to prepare, implement, fund and monitor credible education sector plans to establish sustainable education systems which serve all children.

Now we are increasingly enabling south-south learning to strengthen education results.

Having entered this year stronger than we have been in the past, we will leave it further improved – with a new strategic plan, a fit-for-purpose Secretariat and a refined operational model and theory of change.

All this will ensure that GPE is more than the sum of its parts and is leveraging resources, advocacy and technical expertise for impact.

Since 2002, the Global Partnership has allocated $US 4.3 billion to developing country partners and programs. And since 2009 we have become the largest international funder of basic education in countries affected by conflict. We have adapted our operational model so we make support available in crisis circumstances within eight weeks.

We should all be pleased with this progress but be hungry for further change.

Even with all this work, the reality is education is shockingly under-financed by an estimated $39 billion per year according to UNESCO. Note that is the gap in external financing with it assumed that developing countries will make major new strides in domestic financing.

In the years immediately following the adoption of the MDGs, the world came together and recognized the health goals could not be achieved without a step change in financing and ways of working. Out of this global mobilization came the vaccines alliance and the Global Fund for Aids, TB and Malaria.

I genuinely believe that if we jointly commit to it, following the adoption of the SDGs, we can see such a global mobilization around education.

Already we have seen the following positive moves:

- The global community has repeatedly endorsed education as the highest development priority in multiple My World Surveys
- The ambition of the Incheon Declaration.
- The creation of a Financing Commission in Oslo to guide and inform the global debate.
- The draft outcome document language for the 3rd Financing for Sustainable Development Conference next week in Addis, which declares:

  > "We will scale up investments and international cooperation to allow all children to complete free, equitable, inclusive and quality early childhood, primary and secondary education, including through scaling up and strengthening initiatives, such as the Global Partnership for Education."

Let's build on them.

Let's create a global mobilization that creates the kind of step change in education we saw in health just over a decade ago.

To do that let me recommend the following five actions:

- An immediate advocacy effort to enable better resourcing of the current GPE operational model;
- The design and implementation of a strategy to bring new donor nations to education and new engagement from the private sector and private philanthropy. There is critical need to design innovative financing solutions that will work at scale. There is also a pressing need to ensure better donor co-ordination.

- The undertaking of work to join together efforts within developing countries to create functioning taxation systems and transparent government accounting with work on domestic resource mobilization.

- The resolution of the best approach to meeting the educational needs of children in crisis and conflict.

- Ensuring advances in our capabilities to meet educational needs by exploring seed financing and then upscaling, after appropriate due diligence, new ways of working. I am thinking here of what can be done to create global goods platforms for educational inputs like books, technology, teacher professional support materials and student learning assessment mechanisms so that the we bring the efficiencies that come with scale as a support to country led education planning and implementation.

As you all know only too well, in September the world will be asked to endorse a sustainable development goal for education that will call for "inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all."

It would be a tragedy if the world declined to do so.

But what would be even worse, is if the world did endorse this goal and then did not follow through to make sure it is achievable.

The words are noble, the ambition is audacious indeed. But these words will ring hollow if there are not the resources committed to acquit the goals that are being set.

GPE's 60 developing country partners, donor partners, civil society partners, private sector and our other members, including UN agencies, are all ready to leverage the platform we have built together to make the SDG vision possible.

Those most committed to these goals know that this is the time, this is our fight, this is what we must do for our children throughout the world.

There is a rising tide of optimism on this fundamental quest for quality education for all in order to forge a better world.

Let’s make sure that surge of support delivers the change the world needs.