Remarks at the ADEA Ministerial Roundtable on Quality Education for All at All Levels

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Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you for including GPE here today. It is an honor to stand before so many who are committed to improving the quality of education. It is a great honor to be invited to visit your beautiful continent at a time when there is such energy around education and the role it can play in achieving both the 2030 and 2063 agendas. And it is very special to be back in Senegal because H.E. Minister Thiam is such a very good friend of GPE.

You have asked us to address how to build quality education.

Let us start by looking at where we have come from. Over the last decade and half we have seen more educational progress in more places than we have had at any time in modern history. There are almost 100 million fewer children out of school, completion rates have increased. Progress is possible, and it has not happened by accident. It has happened because countries and their partners intensified their commitment.

As a result, an unprecedented number of countries – including many represented here in this room – are far better equipped than they were in 2000 to give more of their children the education they need and deserve.

They know what works. They have much larger pools of qualified teachers and administrators capable of helping children learn. They are putting in place the physical, analytical and operational infrastructure education systems need to deliver. They have, perhaps most important, the political will to invest more of their own national budgets into education.

When we look at the demographic landscape across the continent of Africa, we know that the SDGs were right to shift focus from access to quality. Africa is a youthful continent, with the youngest population in the world. Children below the age of 15 account for 41% of the population; and the population is expected to more than double to 2.5 billion by 2050. The quality deficit has tremendous short and long-term implications for inclusive growth and development. Africa's children and youth are its future and its demographic burst needs to be turned into a dividend.

Let us talk about the African Union 2063 developmental agenda. As the continental blueprint for development, Agenda 2063 is a bold strategy. CESA places education in its rightful place as a clear engine of growth and prosperity, peace and stability.

To make the powerful aspirations in the AU 2063 agenda and CESA a reality, it is going to take many things, including forward looking African leadership and unwavering support from the global community; making quality education a national and a continental priority at the level of African Heads of State all the way to the AU Summit; deploying enough finance, both domestic and external, that is consistent and long-term. It is going to take working with communities and families; investing in infrastructure and capacity; knocking down the barriers that keep the hardest to reach, most marginalized children out of school; understanding the impact of fragility and building resiliency and preparedness; investing in early childhood education; introducing new and innovative ways to help teachers and administrators; and building strong local governance mechanisms including local education groups (LEG) and communities. It will also take promoting natural synergies between better health & nutrition and education to improve livelihoods, especially for girls.

With these we can create strong and resilient education systems that can be sustained for generations to come and meet the aspirations set out in AU 2063.

Where does GPE fit into this? GPE is a global partnership but also a global fund. GPE is dedicated to building strong systems, improving equity and quality and mobilizing more and better finance. I am proud to lead an organization that it committed to supporting education across the continent. Of the 89 countries eligible for GPE financing, 42 are in Africa. Of the 19 Board seats, 3 are held by African constituencies. We work very closely with ministries in 38 African countries and over 75% of our funding goes to Africa. GPE has a strong developing country voice. It is clear to me that your commitment, drive and technical expertise is enabling GPE to work better, and more effectively.

GPE's focus is on primary and lower secondary and I often get asked why. Let me be clear that upper secondary and tertiary are critical areas. But with low completion rates at the basic level, too many children are left out of education altogether. If you think about the impact that this will have on skills and success later in life, that is why GPE's approach starts with basic education to lay the foundations and ensure every child receives the key preparatory steps for success at higher levels.

How does GPE work? First, GPE helps countries put in place strong education sector plans. Not only because of the analytical, planning and policy work involved. But also, because the plan rallies all players around a common vision. Second, we provide funding of about US$500 million a year to help cover a range of analytical and implementation costs.

GPE's funding is results-based. To receive the first 70%, countries must have 3 things in place. First, a strong education sector plan. Second, commitments in place around domestic resources being deployed towards education. And third a plan to address data deficits. The other 30% is linked to demonstrated progress in learning, equity and efficiency of the system – based on targets chosen by the country.

Countries have chosen some ambitious targets. For example, the Democratic Republic of Congo has linked funding to improved reading performance in the primary grades. Rwanda will administer large-scale learning assessments for the first time and use results to improve learning. Nepal will conduct early grade reading assessments with parental involvement to improve reading. Malawi and Mozambique focused on teachers, with Malawi aiming to reduce the ratio of students to qualified teachers in its most disadvantaged districts and Mozambique increasing the number of teachers participating in comprehensive training.

GPE's funding model has been developed and refined in close consultation with country partners and on the basis of this strong collaboration we are confident it will be a strong driver of better outcomes.

The GPE Board has just approved a new funding and financing framework that we believe will give countries even more and better tools. This new framework consists of four primary elements. First, we will continue to offer the same education sector funding I just described, which supports planning and execution. Second, we will support knowledge and innovation activities that allow countries to draw on and share experience. Third, it will support advocacy, accountability and social mobilization support, which allows our partner countries to build political will, politically at the community level. And, fourth, we are creating a leverage fund – a dedicated pool of funding to incentivize countries to crowd in additional funding at least US$3 for every US$1 of GPE grant funding received. We're very excited about this new framework and look forward to speaking with your ministries of education and finance about how they might put them to use.

It's important to understand that GPE's funding is not prescriptive. Each country has different needs and takes different approaches. Countries will require their own mix of what needs to be paid for. This will include the recruitment and training of teachers and administrators; the development and distribution of rigorous, culturally appropriate learning materials; the construction of the physical infrastructure; programs that bring early stimulation and learning to children before they enter primary school; special interventions aimed at overcoming the challenges of crises and fragility; efforts to help children with disabilities get schooling in far greater numbers than they do now; and strategies giving educational access to more girls, who have historically been underrepresented at all levels.

As I have traveled, I have seen direct evidence of your commitment to putting in place the right set of measures. I remember a fantastic classroom in DRC where a 10th grade geometry teacher had his students rapt with the difference between isosceles and equilateral triangles. I remember in Malawi a teacher heroically struggling with class of 120 children and meeting mother groups dedicated to keeping girls in school. I've been very impressed by the daras here in Senegal and think that they are a creative arrangement to deal with some of the challenges to align religious and secular education. I was also impressed by schools with special needs programs in Ethiopia, and shifts to accommodate more students in Mozambique along with extra classes to accommodate girls returning after becoming pregnant.

When I look to the future of our work, I have great optimism. The world has begun to realize that the education gap matters. Education challenges have risen to the top of the agenda in many settings. We are in the midst an historic moment, and it is not the time for any of us to step back. Instead, we need to lean in and build the political will and financial momentum at all levels of government to put education to the top of the agenda.

Please take this message to Finance Ministers as they meet next week and to the African Union Summit in July so that your countries can get all your children the education they deserve.

I thank you for all you do and promise that we at the Global Partnership for Education will remain with you as you move from strength to strength. Thank you.