Remarks by Julia Gillard, GPE BOARD CHAIR

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How should we develop policy in a fast changing, increasingly technology influenced world?

Good morning, it is a great pleasure to be here today and to follow my fellow panelists, who have done an excellent job of describing the rapid pace of technological change and how it is reshaping education systems. In particular, I have enjoyed hearing about what is happening in Finland, a world leading nation in education and Malaysia, an upper middle income nation from my part of the world.

But I want to paint a very different picture. I ask you to imagine in your mind's eye a school constructed of mud bricks. There is no running water and no electricity. A hundred students crowd in to each small class room. An enthusiastic but largely untrained teacher stands in front of the class. She refers to a text book but there are only a dozen or so copies of it available for the whole class.

I have seen classrooms just like this one in my capacity as Chair of the Global Partnership for Education, the only multilateral body in today's world solely devoted to education. We currently cover 67 low and lower middle income countries, each with unique features, so it follows that not every classroom in every school in every GPE country is quite like the one I have just described.

But - tragically - far too many are yet the children in those classrooms aren't the most disadvantaged.

That title belongs to the 264 million children, who are not in school at all.

So our first pressing global education challenge is enabling these children, who dream of better future, to go to school.

If that isn't daunting enough, we have a second challenge and that is solving the learning crisis. Describing it to you requires me to convey some grim statistics starting with the fact that on current trends, in 2030, the vast majority – 9 out of 10 children in low income countries – will barely complete primary school.

Indeed, without immediate and radical action to invest more in education and vastly improve learning outcomes, over half of the world's upcoming youth generation will emerge from school without the skills needed to thrive in an era in which jobs will require higher and higher skill levels.

GPE model / focus on learning

How do we address education challenges as formidable as these?

As in other areas of policy development, the solution starts with an evidence based plan, which is owned by all the stakeholders and the community.

Working with developing countries to get their plans for education right and then helping fund their delivery is at the heart of the work of the Global Partnership for Education.

In summary - GPE helps countries to diagnose access and learning needs, adopt clear goals and targets, and establish appropriate budgets, action plans, and monitoring.

GPE's aim is not only to support the design of robust, costed, high quality education sector plans – but also to get everyone to align behind them.

At country level, our partnership model brings governments and donors together with teachers, civil society, philanthropists, the private sector and international institutions.

All major education stakeholders have a seat at the table. A strong ethos of mutual accountability binds this arrangement and works against overlap, aid fragmentation and waste.

Our approach also requires developing country partners to increase their own investments in education to at least 20 per cent of national budget.

Thus, GPE countries are growing the resources for education at a much faster rate than countries outside the partnership and ensuring they are targeted to where they are needed most.

To date, GPE has allocated some $4.7 billlion dollars in grants to over 65 countries.

And we are proud of the progress our partners have made: 72 million more children in primary school since 2002 with significant improvements in primary school completion rates, especially for girls.

But this effort must accelerate rapidly, to address the education challenges I have outlined to you today.

We intend to be relentless in our focus on improving learning in school and pre-primary early childhood education. We have ambitious goals including aiming to have 70% of GPE's developing country partners demonstrate improvements in learning outcomes by 2020 and ensuring significant improvements in the availability of trained teachers. Of our active grants in 2017, 98 per cent invested in teacher professional development.

Our attention is also focused on improving the quality of learning assessment systems and increasing the equitable distribution of trained teachers as well as reinforcing investments in knowledge, innovation, and data.

The role of the private sector and philanthropy

But turning plans in to action requires resources and even with increasing domestic expenditure on education, money from donor development partners continues to be vital.

In that regard, I want to make special mention of the UK for its outstanding leadership, along with the European Commission, Norway and many other donors represented here today.

But we know that the old ways of investing in education, which rely on a small number of governments and institutions writing the big cheques is just not enough.

We are actively seeking new partners who can help to get the results we need in education – focused on shared opportunities, creativity and close collaboration.

To that end we are building some exciting new relationships – for example in addressing the data challenge - through a discussion GPE is helping to lead between the public and private sector.

We are also enabling partner countries to unlock more funds for education through our GPE Multiplier fund.

In very simple terms, the Multiplier provides one GPE dollar for every 3 dollars that countries raise elsewhere, for example from multilateral development banks.

Less than a year since we launched it, 7 countries have taken up the opportunity and accessed some $295 million dollars for an input of less than $70m from GPE.

Education finance

But in all areas - our planning support, our grants based financing, our support for knowledge and innovation exchange, our assistance to civil society, our GPE Multiplier Fund - we are restless to do more.

That will taken resources and in just a few days' time in Dakar, the Presidents of France and Senegal will co-host GPE's global financing conference.

We are delighted that a number of heads of state will attend the conference, along with leaders of international agencies, over 55 ministers of education from partner countries, and many international development ministers.

In Dakar, GPE is aiming to mobilize sufficient financing so that by 2020 we can be a US$2 billion a year fund, the benchmark set for us by the landmark report of the Education Commission, led by Gordon Brown and auspiced by Prime Minister Solberg of Norway.

In the days between now and the 2nd of February, I ask you to join us in our campaign to raise vitally needed funds to support education.

Conclusion

In ensuring our Financing Conference is a success, the UK has a special role to play, given its longstanding commitment to education.

I am particularly encouraged that the UK has made girls' education a pillar of foreign, development and security policy and has shown such strong leadership on this issue.

With this alignment of effort and donors, including the UK playing their full part, we will change the lives of millions, and map out a better future for us all.

Thank you.