AIDE MEMOIRE:  
Ministerial High-Level Meeting on Education During the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Pandemic  
May 7, 2020 (10-11:30am GMT)

Background

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Sierra Leone’s Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, led by H.E. Minister David Moinina Sengeh, convened a Ministerial High-level Meeting, focused on mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education worldwide. The Meeting took place on May 7, 2020 through a virtual platform. Representatives from close to 30 of GPE’s developing country partners participated, in addition to several dozen observers from donor countries and partner organizations.

Since the threat of the virus emerged earlier this year, school systems around the globe have undertaken massive closures to protect children and societies on the whole, disrupting the education and learning of 810 million students in developing countries. These alarming numbers moved GPE and its network of partners to organize a response, including this Ministerial Meeting, to foster an exchange of good practices to ensure the continuity of learning during the pandemic and in the eventual recovery period.

This aide memoire recaps the key messages taken from the event’s discussions, which will help GPE and other partners better understand the needs and challenges on the ground as well as ways to enhance the much-needed support to developing country partners.

Key Messages

1. Learning should never stop

Unanimously, we, the developing country partners, agree that maintaining the health and security of our citizens is a top priority for our governments. Concurrently, our common goal of providing continuous education remains critical while dealing with the restrictions and obstacles from protection measures like social distancing. The lessons we learned from the recent Ebola crisis offer some guidance on how to push education objectives forward without compromising health-related priorities. We encourage solidarity and cooperation in implementing effective solutions to support education and allow people to thrive despite significant challenges.

This convening moment was important in fostering knowledge and sharing experience to help us strengthen approaches and policies that better serve our people. We stand fully committed to defending the rights of all our children to obtain a quality education. We duly champion the mission of teachers in maintaining learning despite the lack of traditional (classroom) environments and teaching tools.
2. **Protecting the most vulnerable is crucial**

We aim to leverage inclusion by extending learning opportunities to all, especially highly marginalized groups such as girls, refugees, and the very poor. For girls, it is imperative that we offer them channels of learning to not only protect them from unwanted pregnancies and sexual and gender-based violence, but to also give them education opportunities to thrive in their own right. Bolstering equality also gives us a better-defined path to growth and sustainable development.

Moreover, as we collectively face great economic hardship from the pandemic, many are in danger of slipping further into poverty. Though there will be a significant loss of jobs and livelihoods, education offers solutions to help strengthen countries’ resilience by enabling innovation and better equipping people for the ever-changing demands of the workforce.

3. **Innovation produces effective solutions**

The crisis has forced us to assess our current capacities and approaches to learning. In many ways, it caught us unprepared to deal with such large-scale and prolonged emergencies. Some of us expressed deficiencies and hardships in lacking tools and funding to enact distance learning programs. These gaps pose huge obstacles to fortifying our institutional abilities to teach and broadening our reach to children regardless of background and economic status.

However, others showcased laudable ingenuity in sustaining education during the pandemic. Various technologies such as online tools, radio, and television, have been utilized to help reach students and keep them learning while in the safety of their homes. This crisis underlines the central place technology has and will continue to have in education. However, access to technology is not universal and we share an acute awareness that the most vulnerable children cannot be left behind. We invite the world to collaborate and make available these learning technologies and platforms where possible.

4. **Education financing is more vital than ever**

While we do not know how long this pandemic will persist, the standstill will continue to exacerbate our already precarious economic situations. Amidst immense uncertainty, it is vital to have sustained political and financial support as well as solid cooperation and coordination from donors and partners. We call on them to help us tackle the threats to education and continuous learning. As stated above, the needs are immense, and we are not in the position to overcome our burdens alone. Investing in education is timeless but all the more urgent in pressing and life-threatening situations like the one we are currently facing with COVID-19.

We commend the incredible efforts of fellow Education Ministers who are facing unprecedented challenges caused by COVID-19. While children remain out of school, we are incredibly grateful to reliable and vital partners like GPE, who have continued to support us during a critical time for children and families around the world. We hope that they will continue to stand by us in advocating
and mobilizing resources to ensure the implementation of effective measures and policies and to protect access to quality education for all. In these uncertain times, we must work together to ensure every child can continue to learn.