

Challenges are Opportunities for Change: Summit on Investing in Education in Africa

Classroom Interactions, Relevance, Nutrition and Health Care Are Among the Keys to Strengthening African Education

Washington, D.C. (September 28, 2009) - U.S. Rep. Diane Watson (D-CA) joined experts from the U.S. Agency for International Development, academia, the non-profit arena, and the private sector last Wednesday to examine how all can work together to build educational opportunities for Africa's children and young adults.

Present trends indicate that by 2050, more than half the population of most African countries will be younger than 20. Efforts to provide the best possible education for this significant "human capital" cannot wait, speakers agreed. Congresswoman Diane Watson stressed the critical need to focus on young men as they have increasingly become an at-risk group throughout the African Diaspora. There is a concerted need to address the high levels of school dropout rates, levels of violence and other risky behaviour among this cohort.

U.S. assistance must complement Africa's efforts to ensure that students arrive at school well-nourished, healthy, and ready to learn; are taught by trained, motivated teachers; and continue in school until they have useful job skills or qualifications to attend college. Equally important, Africa needs more capacity to train professionals, particularly graduate-level specialists in science, agriculture, engineering, and other technical fields.

The Summit's featured speakers included:

- Dr. Sarah E. Moten, Chief, Africa Bureau, Office of Sustainable Development, Education Division of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID);
- Dr. Hilary I. Inyang, President, African University of Science and Technology, Abuja, Nigeria;
- Dr. Emmanuel Ojameruaye, Vice-President, Research and Program Development, IFESH (International Foundation for Education and Self-Help); and
- Mr. Charlie Feezel, Education Program Director, World Cocoa Foundation.

The goal of the Summit was to generate a set of necessary strategies targeting both African countries and international donors such as the U.S. on improving education outcomes from the primary to tertiary levels in Africa. A detailed report outlining discussed strategies is forthcoming.

The Summit which was part of the Ronald H. Brown African Affairs Series, was co-sponsored by Leadership Africa USA, the Constituency for Africa and the International Foundation for Education and Self-Help. The 2009 Ron Brown African Affairs Series focused on how Americans of African descent can participate in and support the Obama administration's foreign policy towards Africa.

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