Challenges are Opportunities for Change

Summit on investing in education in Africa

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African Affairs Series | IFESH
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2009 Ronald H. Brown Africa Affairs Series' Education Roundtable, *"Challenges Are Opportunities for Change: Summit on Investing in Education in Africa,"* highlighted how U.S. policy and U.S.-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can effectively support African governments in expanding and strengthening access to education.

The following experts offered their insights:

- Diane Watson (D-CA-33), member, House Foreign Affairs Committee and its Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health;
- 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.

Education is a proven anti-poverty tool. African countries have made significant progress on education in recent decades -- yet hunger still impedes the learning success of many children, and more than 40 million children of primary school age are out of school. Due to limited resources and capacity, it is very difficult for African governments to build and maintain strong educational systems alone.

For U.S. partners, implementing effective education programs means being concerned with congressional appropriations, grants, donations, self-sustaining projects – whatever is necessary to ensure that there are funds available. Roundtable participants emphasized the need to diversify funding by seeking out partners that share a commitment to education.

It is essential to promote synergies among the education sector and other development sectors, such as health, agriculture, economic development, and support for vulnerable children.

Both international NGOs and the private sector have roles to play in strengthening education. For example, NGOs provide grassroots services and support improvements in educational policy. NGOs need to collaborate closely with the communities they serve as well as being efficient and apolitical. The private sector can help launch pilot programs and fill in educational gaps until an effective structure that will serve everyone is built.

Effective strategies for multiplying the impact of interventions, such as training of teacher trainers and building leadership capacity, are important.

For young people who have dropped out of school, a combination of basic academic skills and livelihood skills will help them find success in the workforce.

One of the most critical problems confronting Africa today is its weak tertiary educational system. Trained scientists and engineers are essential for development. Creating an African Science Foundation was identified by one expert as "the highest-impact action for African education in the near term."

Establishing information and communications technology learning centers in villages can benefit schools significantly. High-speed Internet is now available in every African country, and a U.S. National Science Foundation study showed that "Internet 2.0" is financially feasible for Africa.

Introduction

The annual Ronald H. Brown Education Roundtable Series facilitates discussion among key education experts and stakeholders to develop a set of workable strategies to address the education challenges in Africa. The goal is to highlight how U.S. policy and U.S.-based NGOs working in Africa can effectively support African government education policies through public-private partnerships and other mechanisms to expand and strengthen access to education on the continent.

The 2009 Education Roundtable, themed *"Challenges Are Opportunities for Change: Summit on Investing in Education in Africa,"* built on the 2008 Roundtable, which produced recommendations such as examining post-primary education reform; supporting African regional institutions; and focusing on smart and efficient development assistance.

The 2009 Education Roundtable speakers reflected the diversity needed to adopt a cross-sector approach to meeting Africa's education challenges, and thus provided expert insight on actionable steps to effectively address countries' educational priorities. The speakers were:

- Diane Watson (D-CA-33), member, House Foreign Affairs Committee and its Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health;
- 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 Value of Education

An African proverb says that to plan ahead for one year, catch a fish. To plan for a decade, plant a tree. But to plan for a century, educate the people.

At both the global and national levels, education is recognized as a critical anti-poverty tool. One clear indication of the importance policymakers have placed on education: two of the eight Millennium Development Goals focus on education.[1] It is education that will equip youth with the necessary knowledge and skills to improve their lives and those of their families and communities. Of particular note is the dramatic effect of educating girls: an extra year of primary school raises a girl's lifetime wages by 10 – 20 percent, and an extra year of secondary school raises her lifetime wages by 15 – 25 percent.[2]

Developing countries have significantly expanded their education systems in the last three decades. Many have made strides towards expanding enrollment, increasing the years of schooling attained, and improving learning in the classrooms.[3] Yet significant challenges remain. There are 101 million children of primary school age who are out of school, of whom more than 40

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[1] Millennium Development Goal 2 calls for universal primary education and MDG 3 includes the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education as a target (United Nations, 2002).

[2] See www.girleffect.org

[3] UNICEF. 2009. *The State of the World's Children 2009.* www.unicef.org/sow09

million live in sub-Saharan Africa (see Figure 1). Gender gaps still exist at both the primary and secondary levels.[4] Limited access to nutritious meals impedes the motor and cognitive development of many children. These are just a few of the barriers to strengthening education systems in the developing world.

Figure 1: 101 million children of primary school age are out of school
Number of primary-school-age children not in school, by region (2007)
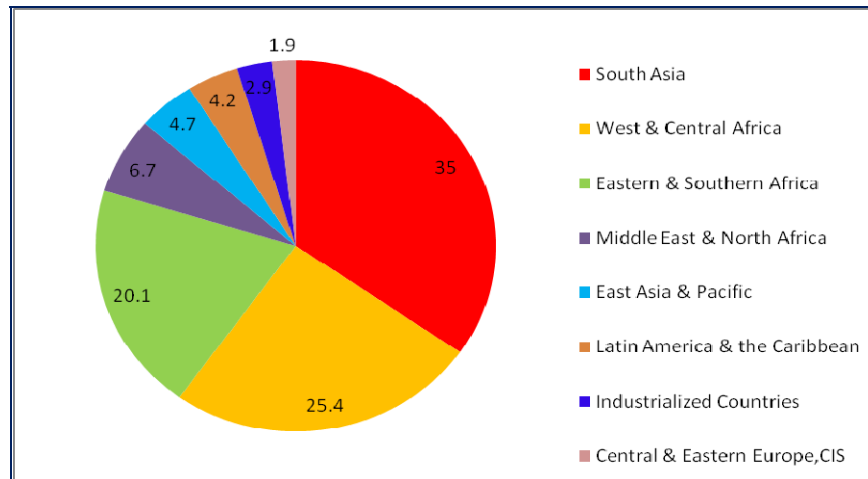
Source: UNICEF global database, 2008.

The tasks confronting sub-Saharan Africa in its mission to give all its children a quality education are especially daunting. The region has one of the lowest primary school enrollment rates, lags behind other regions in youth literacy, and still faces staggering rates of HIV/AIDS and other diseases that impede access to education as well as learning while in school.

A Network of Effects: Crosscutting Impacts on Education

Dr. Sarah E. Moten, Chief, Africa Bureau, USAID's Office of Sustainable Development, Education Division, has been the U.S. government's coordinator for basic education in Africa. She oversees an influential scholarship program, the African Education Initiative.

Moten said that effective education programs require an answer to a key question: What is the root cause of inferior educational outcomes? The straightforward answer is: poverty. Three other major causes are instability, lack of high-quality teaching, and lack of books and resources.

Poverty and education form a circular relationship: poverty has a major impact on education today, while education has a major impact on poverty in the future.

Moten expressed a theme that later speakers developed further: the need to reach the poorest students. Simply expanding the educational system doesn't always accomplish this, particularly if the instruction that is added is not of high quality. "Africa has experienced a decade of degradation of learning outcomes," she said. "We need to focus on improving learning outcomes in conjunction with increasing access."

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[4] See UNICEF, 2008 www.childinfo.org

Moten explained some of USAID's current education priorities, which include potential dropouts and marginalized children, especially girls; children who have recently dropped out and could be brought back into the school system; and youth who have dropped out and require additional skills training to get jobs.

She said that the critical role and the change that is "hardest but most decisive" is the daily interaction between teachers and students. We must begin with what is happening in the classroom, which is the kind of reform that is most likely to succeed, yet it is hard to do this where there is a critical shortage of teachers.

Education must be relevant to people's real lives. In addition to ensuring that materials are culturally appropriate, it is important to make use of all elements in the students' culture that encourage learning. Another participant added that the goals of education must be relevant; we talk about "education for prosperity," but this must be defined through cultural paradigms. Cultural sensitivity also means attention to ethnic or tribal relations.

Moten emphasized the necessity of promoting synergies among the education sector and other development sectors, such as health, agriculture, economic development, and support for vulnerable children. For example, children cannot learn if they arrive at school hungry each morning. Thus, attention to food and agricultural issues are necessary to help solve problems with education.

USAID's bilateral assistance programs now focus on what Moten called "foundational learning skills" -- those needed for lifelong learning. It's important to be able to measure whether these skills are being taught. Are children actually learning what is necessary for survival?

Looking ahead, USAID recognizes the need to address the growing proportion of youth in Africa. By 2050, more than half the population of most African countries will be younger than 20. Another participant added that with 17 million births – that's 17 million new minds -- every year, Africa needs "weapons of mass instruction."

The Development Potential of African Post-Secondary Education

Dr. Hilary Inyang, president of the African University of Science and Technology in Abuja, Nigeria, noted that perhaps the deepest issue confronting Africa today is its weak tertiary educational system. The African University of Science and Technology was founded in the recognition that trained scientists and engineers are essential to development.

To help remedy this, the African University of Science and Technology works with international agencies, the private sector, and nonprofit organizations to harvest the intellect of people who want to help build Africa's economies and who have its people's interests at heart, whether they are African or from the African Diaspora.

Like Moten, Inyang emphasized the need for a holistic approach to education. Sustainable development is now the mantra for African countries. But in order for sustainable development to actually happen, not only should there be advancements in knowledge, but mechanisms in place to engage that knowledge in governance systems and in private sector development. Educational systems in Africa need to see the policy context and the development context. Education must be

configured to address issues such as population management, environmental and natural resources stewardship, and social equity.

Sustainable development also means that African professionals must be integrated into projects. For example, if a dam is being built, the project budget should allocate funding to support local educational initiatives. This money would be used to engage a local university to work on the projects and supply technicians.

He pointed out that the problems in education go beyond a lack of resources to a failure to value and prioritize education. Even within countries' modest GDPs, a low percentage is invested in higher education.

Inyang said that about 15 years ago, he had done a 29-country survey of projects funded by the World Bank. Everywhere, the most pressing need identified was technical skills. "There are still large projects that have been abandoned because there was no sustainability plan," he pointed out. "One of the key factors in this has been lack of technical expertise and engagement of those who have helped plan the project.

Africa once had significant partnerships with U.S. academic institutions. For example, in 1962, Michigan State University helped develop the University of Nigeria. These partnerships can substitute for the types of strategies that built up higher education in the United States – for example, government support for land-grant colleges and through immigrants with ambition.

"We need to renew these alliances and partnerships," Inyang said. "The era of independence struggles is over. This is the era of African renaissance."

Moten mentioned that Rep. Donald Payne (D-NJ) has introduced legislation to help in the essential task of strengthening Africa's higher education systems. The bill would provide funding to do some of the things that Inyang identified.

Participants discussed the need to put science and technology in a relevant context for African students, including giving them an accurate view of history. Inyang said that from looking around them, students in Accra or Lagos could easily reach the conclusion that technology is by and for the West. It is a significant barrier that students believe that Africa has no technical and scientific tradition – and it is simply not true. His university requires a course on the history of science from a global perspective, from the Chinese invention of gunpowder onward. It includes African technologies like sophisticated techniques of gold mining.

Inyang said that the highest-impact action for education in the near term would be to create an African Science Foundation. One of many examples of how it would be useful is that advances in molecular biology have largely been funded by the United States' National Science Foundation.

It is generally other parts of the university – marketing and offices that interact with NGOs – that focus on practical applications. These research programs can be shorter-term and produce results that fit a company's timeframe. Companies also need to have practical test labs available to ensure quality control. These could be either government or private.

Inyang also emphasized the importance of supporting bright and motivated students from villages or poor urban families. For graduate students and professionals, there should be a way to get small grants without a complicated, cumbersome application process. Many science and technology professionals could do a great deal with a $20,000 grant. But sometimes there is a disconnect -- he gave the example of a large international grant program in Nigeria, 80 percent of

whose funds were not used because of the very complicated and labor-intensive application process.

Education at Home and Abroad

Rep. Diane Watson (D-CA-33), a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and its Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, drew on her background as a former school psychologist to talk about educational needs in the African Diaspora.

Watson pointed out that educational visionaries and reformers have been deeply committed to African American youth. Rep. Gus Hawkins, who died in 2007, always held that student failure is not an option. Horace Mann, in the 19th century, said that education is the great equalizer; it is something that cannot be taken away from a person.

"These men whose shoulders we stand on held an unshakeable belief and devotion to the education of our young people, and this responsibility not only fell on the shoulders of great leaders such as Horace Mann and Gus Hawkins but on our shoulders as well," said Watson. "The responsibility belongs to all of us as parents and teachers, aunts, uncles, grandparents, neighbors, the clergy and so forth. We must be concerned about all of our children, particularly those who look like us."

Other participants agreed, adding that we should explore ways to both support and gain from people who were educated in Africa but are now part of the Diaspora.

NGOs and Education: The Challenges and the Possibilities

The International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH) has carried out longstanding work on education in Africa. Dr. Emmanuel Ojameruaye of IFESH discussed basic education and the wider topic of the role of U.S.-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in providing support to African governments in strengthening their educational systems. Africa is extremely diverse, but some points generally apply to all its countries.

There has been significant progress in access to basic education. In the past 10 years, enrollment has risen from less than 70 percent to more than 90 percent of all African children. But there are still many challenges in basic education. For example, equal education for girls lags behind other parts of the world.

International NGOs have a long tradition in Africa. Before independence, they were mainly religious organizations who built schools and hospitals.
The "second wave" of NGO work came in the 1980s and 1990s in the wake of economic structural adjustment programs, which forced many governments to drastically reduce the resources allotted to health, education, and other sectors important to poor people.

NGOs set out to fill the gaps as grassroots service providers. But they have a second role – supporting improvements in policy. They have had a mixed record of success in these two roles in the education sector. In general, African publics still retain high levels of trust in international NGOs, more than they trust government and business, but this is starting to decline due to issues of accountability and effectiveness.

Ojameruaye discussed some constraints that limit NGOs as well as some perceptions of NGOs that may also affect their work. One constraint is pressure or sometimes actual requirements to go along with the priorities of their funding sources, regardless of whether or not these are the top priorities according to the NGO's own mission. Another is the challenge of working in conflict or post-conflict situations. Sometimes this means that NGOs must withdraw from a region completely; other times, it means that their work has little or no impact. "As NGOs, we want to work at the grassroots level," Ojameruaye said. "We want to impact people at that level, but sometimes it is very difficult to reach the underserved people."

Ojameruaye said that there is a perception in some African countries that NGOs are just "development tourists." And there's also sometimes a belief that NGOs are not interested in sustainability - even though they preach it - because pressed to its logical conclusion, sustainability and self-reliance will put NGOs out of business.

What is the way forward for NGOs? Ojameruaye said that the question is no longer whether NGOs play a role in the educational sector, but rather what role and how to improve children's access to basic education and improve its quality. NGOs should be efficient, accountable, grassroots-oriented, and apolitical. They must be seen to be filling a gap, the gap created by the withdrawal or the lack of capacity of government and the private sector to provide certain services for poor people.

A participant asked: how can we measure or determine or set metrics for whether NGOs are demonstrating accountability and effectiveness? Ojameruaye replied that we need to establish accountability on different levels, measured in different ways – for example, financial accountability to donors; self-accountability through an evaluation system that the organization carries out itself; accountability to country hosts, for example the Ministry of Education; and accountability to end beneficiaries, who often don't even see NGO reports as it stands now.

A participant from the African diplomatic corps in Washington D.C. noted that it is essential to have close consultation between NGOs and local people so that all the various priorities can be reconciled. If NGOs don't focus on issues that are identified as priorities by the local community, then much of the money does not really produce results.

There was a discussion of the risk of programs becoming "donor-driven" or NGOs becoming "chameleons," that is, changing according to which funding source they are dealing with. Moten said that everyone should resist either adding to or responding to such pressures. "The NGOs have the experience on the ground; they should feel like they can come in and talk [to USAID]," she said. "We must match the outstanding NGO ideas with the host government and U.S. government needs and priorities."

The Bottom Line: The Role of the Private Sector in Education

Charlie Feezel of the World Cocoa Foundation discussed the role of the private sector in African education. The World Cocoa Foundation's programs combine entrepreneurial training with basic education.

Feezel raised some "big picture" points:

What is learning? We understand more now about the actual chemical changes in the brain taking place during learning. The research highlights the importance of early childhood education – when

development is at its fastest pace and patterns of learning are being set. Early childhood education is easily as important as tertiary education for Africa.

Research also reveals that learning is not necessarily connected with what is "true" – rather, a person's brain just interprets information in any way that makes sense to it. The fact underlines the need for quality education.

Why do we organize education the way we do – i.e. a seasonal schedule, with knowledge packaged in small bits that students are expected to use many years later? We need to rethink this as we consider education in Africa. The way schools are set up must make sense in terms of the community's seasonal and daily schedules. In many countries, education never quite reached rural areas in a form that seemed relevant to farmers deciding whether it was worth the opportunity costs to send children to school. The World Cocoa Foundation is trying to build a bridge, combining livelihood skills with basic academic skills.

Feezel suggested that we appropriate the military concept of "battlespace" -- which abandons the traditional focus on quantitative data like "how many troops" to focus on "what are our capabilities" -- to build "learning space." Using this idea of learning space, we can try to disseminate knowledge in ways that reach people who haven't been well served by the formal education system.

Due to limited resources and capacity, it is nearly impossible for African governments to build and maintain strong educational systems alone. One thing the private sector can do is launch pilot programs. Another is to fill in educational gaps – provide short-term ways to convey knowledge while we build a more effective structure for a system that will eventually serve everyone. The private sector is also sometimes able to forge partnerships with government ministries in order to collaborate on effective programs.

Feezel gave some examples of how business can tie in to education. For example, although there is basically an unlimited market for chocolate, only about half of the cocoa produced in Cote d'Ivoire is usable. This is because both the trees and the methods of cultivation used are old. Thus, agricultural education for families who have grown cocoa beans for generations is essential.

The Potential of Technology

The problem of lack of books and supplies is a common one. "The rise in the need for education is converging with our growing abilities to deliver information nearly anywhere,"Feezel   said.

Establishing information and communications technology learning centers in villages can benefit schools significantly.

High-speed Internet is now available in every African country, and a National Science Foundation study showed that "Internet 2.0" is financially feasible for Africa. It could pay for itself with user fees. Also, Africa could begin to *produce* more of the educational materials it needs – not just import them.

The Search for Resources

As a participant pointed out, implementing effective programs means being concerned with congressional appropriations, grants, donations, self-sustaining projects – whatever is necessary to ensure that there are funds available.

Another participant emphasized the responsibility of NGOs to remain true to their missions, regardless of the priorities of donors. One way to do this is to seek diverse funding sources and partnerships with organizations that share the NGO's values and priorities. The reality now is that only 30 percent of U.S. foreign assistance is ODA (Official Development Assistance, meaning government), compared to 70 percent in the 1970s. The rest is money from the private sector, the public, and nongovernmental organizations combined with remittances home from Africans who have emigrated. So NGOs need to leave behind the traditional belief that "aid equals government" and expand the search for complementary partners to other sectors where more money is actually available.

Another participant agreed that diversifying funding is a good thing, but it's much more difficult for small NGOs than for nationally-known organizations in each country.

In his closing, Ojameruaye emphasized the need to diversify funding; finding funders who share your organization's values and goals is important. "We need to be the 'new missionaries' sharing the good tidings of development," he said.

Multiplier Effects and Long-Term Impacts

There were discussions of strategies and areas of focus that could produce multiplier and longer-term effects to benefit education in Africa. One of these is the "training of trainers" approach. For example, USAID made a grant to IFESH to train teachers in ways to train their colleagues. In all, 12,000 trainers were given the skills they needed to pass their knowledge on to others. Training took place in Africa rather than in the United States, which would have been more expensive and less authentic in terms of context and available resources. Training of trainers is more sustainable and also more participatory and country-driven. Not enough of it is happening, but this is changing.

Another such focus is leadership. Walker Williams of Leadership Africa USA said that after working for a number of years on education in South Africa, he identified building leadership capacity as one of Africa's greatest needs. "If we are successful, we'll change the lives of a lot of young people on the continent," Williams said.

Recommendations

- Forge synergies among development objectives and programs, particularly between education and nutrition/health. Poor nutrition impedes the learning success of many African children.

- Respond to the largely unmet need for early education; brain research has consistently proven its importance.

- Continue to strengthen basic education. More than 40 million African children of primary school age, the majority girls, are not in school.

- Increase girls' enrollment in secondary school, where a gender gap also still exists.

- Strengthen Africa's tertiary educational system, particularly science and engineering programs. Support technical education for bright and motivated students from villages and poor urban families.

- Renew and build Africa's partnerships and alliances with U.S. academic institutions.

- Create an African Science Foundation.

- Train trainers of teachers to address the critical shortage of teachers; identify strategies to strengthen daily classroom interactions between teachers and students.

- Ensure that education is relevant to students' lives and use every element in students' cultures that encourages learning. Promote leadership development.

- Explore ways to support and to gain from the experience of people who were educated in Africa but are now part of the Diaspora.

- Encourage the private sector to launch pilot programs and fill in educational gaps.

- Establish information and communications technology learning centers in villages. Ensure that schools benefit from high-speed Internet, now available in every African country.

Participating Organizations

Academy for Educational Development
ACDI-VOCA
Africa 2010 Project
African Development Bank
African University of Science and Technology (AUST)
American Institutes for Research
American University
Arizona State University
Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities
Association on Third World Affairs
BIG-Africa Partnerships
Black Press Foundation
BMI Consultants
CARE
Choice Consultants
Constituency for Africa
Department of State
Dr. Donald W. Jones Foundation
Dr. Fleming Consultants
Embassy of Jamaica
Embassy of Madagascar
Embassy of the Republic of Cape Verde
Executive Office of the Mayor
Foreign Service Institute - SA-42
FS Taylor and Associates, CPAS
Graduate School
Higher Education for Development
Institute of International Education
Inter-American Development Bank
International Relief and Development Inc.
International Research and Exchanges Board
International Youth Foundation
IREX
ISEP
IYF
Jay's International
JLM & Associates
Lansing, MI - Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania International Project Partnership
Medgar Evers College, City University of New York
Motorola Inc.
Northrop Grumman

ONE Campaign
Parity Partners
Peace Corps
Riverside Real Estate & Development Co., L.L.C.
RRED Co.
SAIC
Sum of Change Productions LLC
The Academy for Educational Development
The Africa Society of the National Summit on Africa
The Batonga Foundation
Total Service Solutions
TransAfrica Forum
Transitional Trade
U.S. Africa Sister Cities Foundation Inc.
U.S. Department of Education
UN Information Center
UN International Fund for Agriculture Development
USAID
USDA
Winrock International
Worldwide Responsible Accredited Production
Worldwise Services, Inc.
WrightWay Consultants