

Education International: Education in Crisis Seminar

The future of education and development

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Check against delivery

Courtesies: Good morning, and many thanks to Education International for organising this most topical seminar on Education in Crisis. I would also like to thank Monique [Fouilhoux] in advance for moderating this session, and Haldis [Holst] for the round-table discussion to follow. While I'm always happy to talk about how I see the future of education and development, I'm really looking forward to discussing this in more depth and to hearing more from you.

To begin, I've been asked to outline my key messages on developments in education. So let me share them right away

- First education matters (but while we all know why it matters, it seems that we must keep reminding our governments).
- The Millennium Development Goals (the MDGs) and the Education for All goals have generated dramatic progress in many areas.
- But there are two key concerns: loss of momentum – in part because of the impact of the global economic crisis, but also because we are witnessing a creeping complacency about education itself.
- I want to stress quality, quality, quality.
- I want to stress teachers, teachers, teachers.

- And I want to share some examples of good news – of success.

I will also share my thoughts on where do we go right now, to address the immediate impact of the global economic crisis on education and where we go after the 2015 deadline for the MDGs, finishing with a few words about the role of my organization, the Global Partnership for Education, in this journey.

First, let's remind ourselves of why education matters

I'm not alone in thinking that ensuring every child has a decent education is the tipping point for lasting social and economic development.

Investing in education is the single most effective means of reducing poverty: if all children in low-income countries could read, it is estimated that global poverty would drop by twelve per cent. Every extra year of education for a girl increases her future income by between ten and twenty per cent. And women invest ninety per cent of their incomes in their households – so the families of educated women are less likely to be poor.

But the impact goes way beyond income. There's a virtuous circle when it comes to education and health, with education helping children and families stay healthy, and good health helping children to learn. It is estimated that half the reduction in child mortality over the past 40 years can be attributed to better education for women.

And education helps to smooth out the differences between people, cultures and class. Put simply, education reduces the likelihood of conflict. One study has found that increasing the school enrolment rate by at least ten per cent

reduces the likelihood of a country experiencing conflict by three per cent. And as enrolment rates for boys rise, the duration of conflicts falls.

If education were not a human right, the economic bottom line would make it essential to invest in education anyway. Every single dollar invested in education generates ten to fifteen dollars in return. I challenge even the most fearless and skilled financial trader to make such a massive return on a one dollar investment!

So, education matters. But where do we stand? Let's look more closely at the MDGs, the Education for All goals, and progress

I'm sure we know them off by heart: MDG two: achieve universal primary education. MDG three: promote gender equality and empower women. And the Education for All goals, aiming to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015.

We must acknowledge outstanding progress, with more children now enrolled in primary school than at any time in history. In 2000, when the world adopted the MDGs, there were one-hundred million children out of school. Today, despite population growth, that number has fallen by almost forty million. In all, sub-Saharan Africa has slashed the number of children out of primary school by around one quarter – down from forty million in 2000 to just over thirty million today – an achievement matched by no other region. We are also closing the gap between boys and girls when it comes to enrolment. These are fantastic achievements, bolstered by national and international mobilization around the MDG and EFA goals.

But – and I’m afraid there has to be a ‘but’ – there are still 61 million children who are out of school. Back in 2000, the poorest, the marginalised, children caught up in war, and very often girls, accounted for most of those out of school. Twelve years on, it is *still* the poorest, the marginalised, the children caught up in war, and very often girls, who miss out. In at least 63 countries around the world, girls from poor households are far less educated than other groups. Many children with disabilities, from particular ethnic groups, refugees, and those in remote areas – still miss out on learning because of who they are. And children who live in countries affected by armed conflict account for forty-two per cent of those out of school.

A fair number of countries will hit the 2015 target of universal primary school completion, and should be applauded. But the better we do on the number of children in school, the clearer the remaining challenges have become. In short, education has to be about more than getting children into the classroom.

The progress made on the numbers in response to MDG two should be seen as a ‘graduation’ to the next and crucial phase: learning at school, staying in school and a compact between education systems and communities to forge education that delivers on its promises.

I have similar reservations about the progress made on MDG three. Many girls still face discrimination at home, in their communities and, very importantly, in the classroom. They still care for younger brothers and sisters, still run back and forth to fetch water and firewood when they should be in school, still do more than their fair share of household chores than their brothers. And they still lag behind when it comes to secondary school enrolment.

So, before we get too excited about the MDGs, let's remember two things: first, they are milestones on the way to something bigger and better: a good quality education. Second, we still have to reach them. Sadly, if current trends continue, we could have more children out of school in 2015 than we have today, breaking the promise we made to children back in 2000. That is just shameful. Why have we lost momentum?

Let's talk about stalling progress and the economic crisis

The very title of this seminar echoes the views that many of us share, including the United Nations Secretary-General: education is in crisis. I fear that education is losing its place on the global stage, and that – once the 2015 deadline for the MDGs has been reached – education may be swallowed up in broader development goals, losing the sharp focus on education that will still be needed.

A look at aid figures for the share of total aid to education that is targeted to basic education flags up some concerns, with aid to basic education dwindling as a share of the education aid spending between 2002-2003 and 2008-2009 from Austria, from our host country Belgium, and from Canada, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands. Across the multilaterals, the share of basic education as a proportion of total aid to education fell from sixty-one per cent in 2002-2003 to fifty-one per cent in 2008-2009. Did somebody, somewhere, decide we could now sit back and relax when it comes to basic education?

As well as concerns about aid, there are worries about education spending in a number of poor countries as a result of the global economic and financial crisis. According to the 2011 Education for All Global Monitoring Report, forty per-

cent of low-income countries with available data cut education spending in 2009.

And the impact of the crisis on families is a direct threat to education. More pressure on family budgets may push more children out of school, with studies suggesting that an additional three-hundred and fifty-thousand students could fail to complete primary school as a result of the crisis. And, as usual, most will come from the poorest households. Seven of the eighteen poorest countries surveyed for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2011) – countries with three-point-seven million children out of school – cut their education spending in 2009.

What makes all of this worse is a creeping complacency

I'm alarmed that there isn't more momentum, more enthusiasm, more action, not only to tackle the immediate problems and maintain the achievements of recent decades, but also to build on these achievements. Instead, there is a sense of a 'job well done' – that getting children into school is somehow enough.

But it is only now that the real work – the tough work – can, and must, begin – especially with education under threat as a result of the economic crisis, with progress towards the education goals stalling, and with so many children either never enrolling in school, or dropping out completely.

We have to focus on quality, quality, quality

The challenge now is to hang on to the progress that has been made, and use it as a launch pad for equally dramatic progress on *quality*. The sad fact is that

we are not doing enough to *keep* children in school. We are not doing enough to ensure that education delivers on its promises.

Quality is what keeps a child in the classroom, giving them the education they need to thrive and prosper in later life. But the impact of a good quality education goes beyond the individual child: tackling inequities within and beyond their classroom, acting as a safeguard against conflict and instability.

It is here that we need the hard work most of all. Even when children are in school, too few of them are learning: many children in the poorest countries cannot read anything at the end of grade two. The average child in a poor country learns less than ninety-five per cent of what is learned by a child in a rich country. In some African countries, children with five years of education still have a forty per cent chance of being illiterate.

The end result: millions of children leave school without even the most basic skills they need for future employment.

I'm obviously worried about falls in education spending. But I am just as worried about what that education spending – whether rising or falling – is actually achieving. In May this year, a report by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact found that UK aid programmes to support education in Ethiopia, Rwanda and Tanzania – together worth more than one billion UK pounds – are failing to improve children's basic literacy and maths skills. Yes, the aid has helped to fund the expansion of the education systems in these countries, but there was too little focus on whether children were actually learning anything. The report said: “To achieve near-universal primary enrolment but with a large

majority of pupils failing to attain basic levels of literacy or numeracy is not, in our view, a successful development result.”

I’m sure we’re all aware of the tangible, concrete problems that undermine the quality of education: the lack of basic resources such as textbooks, paper, pencils and chalkboards in far too many schools. The lack of adequate school facilities, especially water and sanitation facilities and toilets for girls, can increase the number of children dropping out of school, or choosing not to go at all.

But we must also focus on teachers, teachers, teachers

Given the importance of education for poverty reduction, stability, and economic growth, teachers hold the future development of their countries in their hands, as well as the prospects for each individual pupil. That’s quite a responsibility. After all the talking about the MDGs, the EFA goals, the budgets, the pressures, the future, what you have is a teacher standing in front of a class. This is where education actually happens, and where the sharp edge of the challenges to education is felt most keenly.

Too many teachers are being stretched too far – they perform miracles each day without the support, training, basic equipment or textbooks they need to do their job. Very often, they are working for low pay, or pay that simply doesn’t arrive for months on end. UNICEF has reported that that real pay levels for teachers are falling in the wake of the economic crisis – a comparison of teachers’ salaries in more than twenty countries in 2009 found that many were already near the poverty line. Teachers living on the poverty line? How can this happen?

And there are simply not enough teachers. Worldwide, we would need another two million teachers in our classrooms to achieve universal primary education by 2015 – more than half of these in sub-Saharan Africa. Obviously, that's not going to happen.

But here again, there are problems that go beyond the numbers. Too often, children are being taught by teachers who are doing their absolute best, but who are unqualified. Let me quote you one gloomy statistic: in South Sudan, a survey by USAID has found that sixty-three per cent of teachers are untrained and that an astonishing ninety-six per cent have no formally recognized teaching qualification. What does this do to the prospects for the world's newest nation, emerging from decades of war?

Let's lift the gloom a little and look at how some countries have responded to the crisis by protecting their education.

According to research by the Overseas Development Institute, a number of developing countries have been courageous in their support for education in the face of the economic crisis.

Ethiopia, for example, took a long hard look at its priorities, and actually increased expenditure for priority sectors such as education, health and infrastructure by almost one quarter at the height of the crisis in 2008 and 2009.

Uganda has introduced tax refunds for registered businesses that import education materials.

Zambia has targeted expansionary fiscal stimuli at government spending on education, health and infrastructure, with government policy on poverty reduction during the crisis focusing on the protection of key social expenditures in education and health.

These countries demonstrate that support for education is, very often, a question of will, of priorities, of vision. Such examples pave the way for a new and stronger commitment to education.

And let's look ahead to the post MDG and EFA agenda

At the global level: I'm encouraged by the United Nations Secretary-General's new initiative – Education First. Ban Ki-Moon is giving this issue a much-needed and timely nudge – to put education back on the table. And I agree with its three 'pillars', which not only remind us of what still need to be done, but set the scene for what follows the MDGs and the EFA goals:

- First, put every child in school.
- Second, improve the quality of learning
- Third, foster global citizenship

Putting every child in school means tackling the barriers to school enrolment and completion – to looking at what it is that keeps a particular child out of school and tackling the problems at their source.

Improving the quality of learning means tackling chronic shortages of qualified teachers and learning materials. But it also means more early learning programmes to make sure that children are ready for primary school, working

closely with families so that learning continues outside school, addressing the hunger that robs children of the ability to learn and the language barriers that undermine their schooling. It means proper systems to measure progress. And it means – very importantly – making sure that education actually gives children the skills they need for adult life.

These are not new objectives, but they badly need reinforcing, and Education First aims to do just that.

What is new is a welcome emphasis on education as a route to global citizenship, on education as a way to transform societies. The Secretary-General writes: “Education must fully assume its central role in helping people to forge more just, peaceful, tolerant and inclusive societies. It must give people the understanding, skills and values they need to cooperate in resolving the interconnected challenges of the twenty-first century”.

The Global Partnership for Education is playing its part by working to keep education front and centre

Unfortunately, the economic crisis has strengthened an old and damaging myth: that there are not enough resources to address both the quantity and quality of education at the same time.

At the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) we tackle this myth head-on. Our partner countries spend more of their domestic budgets on education than non-Global Partnership countries (where spending on education is, as we have seen, falling), and their children are twice as likely to complete primary school as children in other developing countries.

Our priorities for the future mirror those of the Secretary-General, and I'm sure they will resonate with all of you here today:

- Expanding early childhood education
- Providing free and compulsory basic education for all
- Promoting learning and life skills for young people and adults
- Increasing adult literacy, achieving gender parity and gender equality, and, above all
- Improving the quality – quality, quality – of education.

To finish, let me just say...

... in development, as in economics and even in our daily lives, we often hear talk about 'trade-offs' – about what we might have to sacrifice in order to reach a particular goal. But there are no 'losers' when it comes to a good quality education for every child. Children, families, communities, nations and economies prosper. The only things that are sacrificed are ignorance, poverty and inequality. And that is surely the most cost effective investment any country can make.

Thank you

