

Submitted Testimony
House Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
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March 3, 2015

Madam Chair and Ranking Member Lowey, I am pleased to submit this testimony on behalf of the Basic Education Coalition, a group of 18 humanitarian and development institutions dedicated to ensuring that the world's children receive a quality basic education. My name is Daniel Stoner, and I am the Co-Chair of the Coalition's Executive Board of Directors and the Associate Vice President of International Programs for Save the Children, USA. The members of the Basic Education Coalition are deeply appreciative of the Committee's continued support for international basic education programs, and we sincerely thank you for your strong and consistent leadership in providing hope and opportunity to children around the world. For fiscal year 2016, the Coalition recommends a U.S. investment of \$800 million in international basic education programs, with at least \$600 million of that amount coming from the Development Assistance account.

We certainly appreciate that Congress must grapple with hard spending choices and tough political realities. However, ensuring that the world's poorest and most vulnerable children can learn to read, write, do basic math and acquire critical life skills remains one of the best investments the United States can make toward eliminating global poverty. Now is not the time to cut efficient and effective programs, like basic education, that are a cornerstone for success in sustainable development across all sectors and have a deep impact on the future. Programs that offer hope and opportunity to millions of children and youth, regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality and ability level, build markets for U.S. exports, and enhance stability and security worldwide.

Throughout my career, I have visited and worked with children and families all over the developing world. I have had the opportunity to see countless schools and meet with teachers, students and parents. They all want the same thing. They want their children to learn. From the Ethiopian subsistence farmer who volunteers his time to give children extra tutoring on reading, to the star 6th grader from Bangladesh who speaks out against teacher violence, the children and their communities want more and better education. The creative spirit of children is alive and well. In USAID supported programs children have written and illustrated books that are then used to teach others. These children will become the future teachers and leaders if we can support their education. It is really no wonder that, according to a recent UN survey called the *My World Survey*, citizens in nearly 200 countries around the world say that a good education should be at the very top of the priority list for development

For many, the right to an education is something those living in the poorest and most extreme circumstances will sacrifice and fight to obtain. Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani girl who defied the Taliban and was attacked for demanding that she and other girls have a right to an education is a stark reminder of this bravery. In front of the United Nations she later proclaimed:

"Let us wage a global struggle against illiteracy, poverty and terrorism and let us pick up our books and pens. They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one pen and one book can change the world. Education is the only solution."

Like Malala, students and teachers around the world refuse to sacrifice their right to an education each and every day. Despite risking acid attacks in Afghanistan, kidnapping in Nigeria, working long hours to help their families while attending school at night, or overcoming gender barriers - their united voices are growing louder.

The US Response: With the support of this committee, USAID has joined in the global effort to ensure children like Malala have access to quality education. Through the three goals of the USAID education strategy, and newly announced *Room to Learn* and *Let Girls Learn Initiatives*, USAID is making clear progress and changing the lives of young people around the world. In FY13 alone, US government funding helped enroll over 18 million children in USAID operated primary, secondary and equivalent schools, trained over 333,000 teachers and provided 37 million learning materials.

With strong global support and a clear U.S. strategy, we have the opportunity to build on the tremendous progress that has been made with the benefit of the resources allocated by this committee. Overall, the number of children who are out of school around the world has dropped by almost half, from 107 million in 1999 to 57 million today. Since 1999, the number of children enrolled in pre-school has risen by almost half. Great strides also have been made to improve gender equality, demonstrated by the rise in girls' enrollment to over 90% in 52 countries.

We have seen great progress at the country level as well. For example, in Afghanistan there were fewer than 1 million students in primary school in 1999; now there are more than 8 million, 5 million of which are enrolled in schools with USAID assistance. In many sub-Saharan African countries, more than twice as many students enter first grade compared to a decade ago. Ethiopia has made great progress getting children into school on time, increasing rates from 23% in 1999 to 94% in 2011. Since 2006, countries like Lao People's Democratic Republic, Rwanda and Vietnam have reduced the out of school populations by at least 85%.

The Continued Challenge: Though great gains in global education have been made, much remains to be done. Currently, 57 million primary school-age children and 69 million adolescents are out of school. In addition, 250 million children, or a staggering 40% of the world's primary school-age population, are failing to learn the most basic skills. The world community has failed every child who was left out of school or sat in school not learning anything. USAID has played a critical role in shining the light on this global learning crisis, and we now know that the impact of education cannot be measured in the number of students enrolled, or the number of hours in a classroom. Rather, education's impact is seen when learning outcomes improve.

USAID has led a charge to deepen evidence based programming. USAID funded early grade reading assessments have helped focus the world community on what actually works and what does not work when it comes to improving children's learning. Other bilateral, multilateral, and

private sector donors, have followed the US Government's lead and are now prioritizing learning outcomes.

Children learn both inside and outside of the classroom. Every successful school has parents and community members who are actively supporting children's learning. We applaud USAID's recognition of the power of community engagement to improve children's learning. In places such as Pakistan, Ethiopia, Peru, and Guatemala USAID programs are helping parents and community members to engage in children's learning opportunities. These parents and community members are working more effectively in partnership with teachers and government officials to address children's learning needs.

Another great challenge we face in achieving these goals is reaching children living in conflict-torn and fragile states, which are home to half of the world's out-of-school children. By increasing access to education and learning opportunities in conflict and crisis situations under Goal 3 of the education strategy, USAID is working to ensure that at-risk children and adolescents have access to a quality education. In addition, the *Room to Learn Initiative* is providing additional efforts in South Sudan, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

With conflicts lasting an average of 12 years, and refugees and IDPs displaced for an average of 17 and 20 years respectively, generations of young people are missing out on an education and the opportunity to fulfill their potential. However, through quality formal and non-formal education programs, we can provide children and youth in conflict areas with a sense of hope and normalcy when their lives have been disrupted, promote their psychosocial well-being and cognitive development, and lessen their risk of being recruited into dangerous activities.

Unfortunately, schoolchildren in conflict areas are increasingly the targets of extremists groups who understand an uneducated populace is easier to control and fear the power of education. Attacks by Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Taliban in Pakistan, the Lord's Resistance Army in South Sudan and Al-Shabaab in Somalia are becoming all too common. As the Committee is well aware, in one of the most disturbing attacks over 250 schoolgirls were kidnapped by Boko Haram in North Nigeria while sleeping in their dormitories. To date, the girls have yet to be rescued and reports suggest many have been sold as child brides or for use as suicide bombers.

To address some of these challenges, USAID is working under Goal 3 to extend access to education to at-risk children. For example, USAID is working with aid organizations and other international donors to ensure children in Syria and surrounding refugee countries have access to education programs, as well as life-saving health and counseling services. In Egypt, USAID is working with the ministry to reduce the negative impacts of future political and social disruptions on the school system and increase the delivery of educational services during a crisis. In Afghanistan, programs are working to reverse the impact of the Taliban regime on young girls and eliminate the gender gap. Programs continue to increase the number of qualified teachers, raise girls' school attendance and work directly with the ministry to create gender-sensitive policies and procedures. Since the end of Sierra Leone's civil war, programs have helped to increase access to psychosocial education, provided vocational training to former soldiers, unaccompanied and internally displaced children, children of adult amputees, and teenage mothers.

By ensuring at-risk children and a burgeoning youth population are in school -- and learning -- we can foster stability and political reform. A population that is able to read, write and think critically is far more able to hold its leaders accountable. By equipping populations vulnerable to civil war and regional conflict with the skills and capacities to shape their own future, the U.S. also can better promote lasting peace.

USG programs help not only children in conflict and crises affected countries, but also the poor, marginalized and often forgotten. U.S. assistance has been critical in finding new ways to reach these groups with meaningful, effective education. Through innovative, low-cost technologies, such as interactive and long-distance radio instruction, cell phones, computers, and the internet, we can now reach even more children who would have otherwise remained marginalized and vulnerable. With relatively modest investments and innovative, low-cost measures, we can greatly expand our reach. For example, \$10 million in spending means that an estimated 100,000 more children annually can receive a good quality primary school education. In Southern Sudan, radio-based learning and other technologies are being used to deliver quality education programs to populations ravaged by years of civil war.

Achieving the goals of the USAID education strategy and ensuring that children are not only enrolled in school - but also learning - will require continued interventions and a strong commitment by the United States. Support for basic education is imperative to help USAID reach its strategic goals of improving reading skills for 100 million children in primary grades and increasing equitable access to education in crisis environments for 15 million children. With the US Government's continued leadership in this area, the global community is in a much stronger position today to help children, strengthen communities and improve countries' development outcomes.

Education's Impact on Economic Growth: Education programs not only increase security and stability, but are essential to global economic growth. As populations around the world continue to grow and the U.S. economy emerges from its protracted recession, education programs will not only help ensure stability, but will also help to expand the U.S. consumer base in the developing world. Through Goals 1 and 2 of the education strategy, USAID is working to foster the skills necessary for a sustainable global workforce and long-term trading partners. Today, the fastest-growing markets for America's goods are in developing countries, representing 40% of U.S. exports and one out of every five American jobs. For every 10% increase in U.S. exports, there is a 7% boost in U.S. employment. Research shows that if all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty – a 12% drop in global poverty. Therefore, educating the world's poor is essential to building the stable trading partners that growing U.S. export markets require.

BEC member programs, under Goal 1 of the USAID education strategy, are helping to improve student learning and reading skills, so that one day these children can enter the workforce and be productive members of society. In Yemen, children have faced high drop-out rates and low primary school enrollment. Through BEC programs, learning has improved for over 1.5 million children and oral reading fluency has increased by 500 percent. In Egypt, where youth face continued instability, programs have dramatically improved literacy - up to 194% in some cases.

The Early Grade Reading Assessment was so successful in Egypt, that the Ministry of Education requested support from USAID to expand the program to all 27 governorates.

More than just programs: U.S. taxpayer support is having a tangible impact, but our progress is not based on dollars alone. Our knowledge transfer is as important as our program success. We work directly with local stakeholders, build local capacity, transfer technology and innovation, strengthen systems, and share technical expertise. Through direct program interventions in the field to expand access, improve learning, and foster long-term impact, US programs are more sustainable and create lasting change.

U.S. assistance is recognized and valued by the people with whom we work and helps to build relationships with partner countries. Programs help to increase local capacity and opportunity, while building long-term trust and understanding with communities and individuals. U.S. assistance is notable for its ability to work hand in hand with local governments and communities to find solutions to critical problems. In Senegal, BEC member programs have been working since 2003 to develop a middle school system that is relevant for rural youth to whom the 9th grade is likely to be a terminal degree. Working with parents and communities to build village schools, the programs provide opportunities to young people, particularly girls, to continue their education. In Honduras, utilizing a community approach to support school capacity has helped increase attendance to 90% in BEC member supported programs.

Value of Investment: As pressure to reduce the budget is at an all-time high, there is no better way to stretch our development dollars than to invest in education. For every \$1 spent on education, as much as \$10 to \$15 can be generated in economic growth. Or, look at its effect on global health. Young people who have completed primary education are roughly half as likely to contract HIV and AIDS as those with little or no education. Women with secondary education are far more likely to be aware of measures for preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV, which currently infects 370,000 children a year. A recent study found that half of the reduction of child mortality over the past 40 years was due to better education of women. In addition, one study of 63 countries demonstrated that educating women was by far the most important factor in reducing malnutrition - more important even than improvements to the food supply. In many countries, the school functions as the center of community life and a focal point for other development efforts, such as deworming and ensuring access to clean water, as envisioned in Mrs. Lowey's "Communities of Learning" approach.

In conclusion, we now have the benefit of strong Congressional support, a clear USAID strategy on education, innovative solutions, and strategies that directly address country needs. We have the opportunity for a deeper, more sustainable impact on the lives and hopes of the world's poor children. The Basic Education Coalition looks forward to working with the Subcommittee and Congress, to ensure that quality basic education remains a pillar of our foreign assistance. By so doing, and by ensuring program accountability and impact, we can help alleviate poverty, strengthen societies, foster stability and security, and spur economic growth, abroad and here at home.

Thank you for your continued support and for your consideration of our request.